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A MINISTERING ANGEL; OR, ROYAL THORNLEIGH'S MISTAKE.

BY GEORGIANA DICKENS,

AUTHOR OF "A SCATHING ORDEAL," "LORD ROTH'S SIN," "PUT TO A TEST," "THE COST OF A FOLLY," ETC.



"HE IS QUITE STUNNED. EYE"

A Ministering Angel;

OR,

Royal Thornleigh's Mistake.

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TO A TEST," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERRUPTED DECLARATION.

IT was four o'clock on the eve of a regular old-fashioned Christmas-tide, with its full complement of frost and snow; for, as far as the eye could see, old Father Christmas had his customary hoary aspect, without which one never seems fully to realize that his festive reign has commenced.

But plenty of evidence as to the character of the season was shown by the clusters of bitter-sweet, and wreaths of evergreens, clematis and autumn leaves which adorned the interior of Elsmere Hall, even had the exterior surroundings been less conclusive.

The hall itself was a singular combination in its structure, of ancient and modern architecture. Built originally in the last century it had passed down through several generations of Elsmeres who had taken pride in retaining in their name the fine old property.

From time to time wings had been added here and there, with turrets and towers and fancy windows, until from the outside very little of the old structure was apparent. Inside it was different, and it was of the original part that the Elsmeres were especially proud, and spared no trouble or expense to keep it in a state of preservation; and on occasions of this kind it was the great old square hall with its open fireplace, which formed one of the chief attractions, and where assembled many a merry party who made the great beams overhead ring with the echoes of their mirth and frolics.

Just at this moment, however, the hall seemed deserted but for the presence of a slight girlish figure which was kneeling before the blazing logs, with a dimpled chin sunk deep in two little hands the whole attitude betokening deep thought hardly in keeping with the lively surroundings.

There was another occupant, who, although not a human one, was certainly a most intelligent creature, as could be seen from the way in which he looked up continually into the face of his young mistress.

Perhaps the faithful animal could read something in that face which did not quite accord with the time and place. Yet surely the proud daughter of the Elsmeres could have no reason to look sad and wistful at this bright season! And yet brute instincts are not often at fault in divining when something is amiss.

But Maud Elsmere did not long remain silent. Patting the dark, shaggy coat of the animal, she said, softly: "What ails you, Don, old fellow? Is my silence infectious? It will not do to be gloomy to-day; and it is time for me to be moving."

She had just risen from her kneeling position on the hearth-rug, when her father entered the hall.

"Isn't it time you were dressing, Maud?" he asked—and there was the faintest shade of displeasure on his dark, grave face.

"I am going now, papa. But first I want you to see that all is arranged to your satisfaction."

"I have already done so, my dear," and the slight cloud was succeeded by a smile of wondrous tenderness; "and, my darling, I can only say that even your poor mother could not have succeeded better."

Maud drew nearer to the tall, fine-looking man, and his softened mood seemed to affect her greatly.

"There, Maud, my child, let me see you looking your brightest. You are going to have a very happy evening, I trust, my darling."

"Yes, papa. I am always happy."

As Maud went toward the door her father said hastily, "I forgot to tell you that Mr. Thornleigh has telegraphed that he intends to be with us this evening. He finds he can manage to come, after all."

"Very well, papa."

And Mr. Elsmere had no idea how much his daughter was affected by the news she so calmly received.

Her head seemed in a perfect whirl as she went through the short broad corridor which led to the main staircase; but even there she was not free to indulge in thought.

Several visitors were staying at the house, and one of them, Lucy Millington, who had been one of Miss Elsmere's schoolfellows, came bounding up the stairs after her.

Mrs. Millington was the widow of a refined, but improvident, naval officer, whose death had left her in somewhat straitened circumstances. Her one hope of rescue from a life of genteel poverty was based on the beauty of her only child.

Lucy had, from her earliest infancy, been drilled in her mother's creed—that wealth stood pre-eminent on the list of qualifications for a suitable husband.

In order to fit her daughter for a high position in society, Mrs. Millington had drawn rather freely on her not very ample resources, and had sent Lucy to one of the best city schools. The widow's gratification at the intimacy there formed between her child and Miss Elsmere was certainly more sincere than most of the "gratifications" she was wont to express; and to add to her satisfaction came Miss Elsmere's very cordial invitation that Mrs. Millington should accompany Lucy on this first visit to Elsmere.

The beautiful heiress was not by any means inclined to be suspicious. She was too genuine and true-hearted herself to suspect others of mean motives, and it was pleasant to her to see Lucy's childishly gleeful delight at the prospect of the evening's festivities.

But Lucy and her light words were soon forgotten, and as Maud went to her dressing-room, a softened brightness made her pure face perfectly lovely.

Hers was no commonplace type of beauty. Her oval face was generally pale; and the dark hair, which waved slightly, forming pretty curves against the clear skin, would have led one to expect that when her darkly-fringed eyelids were raised, a pair of dark-brown eyes would be disclosed, instead of the blue ones that were really there. Many people thought that in the contrast of color—between hair and eyes—Maud's chief charm lay. At any rate, she was charming; so every one allowed, in spite of a certain pride of demeanor which kept all the gentlemen in the neighborhood from acknowledging that they were under the spell of her beauty.

An hour later, Mr. and Miss Elsmere were receiving their guests. All the neighbors in the vicinity had been invited, so that, including the guests already installed at the Hall, there would be a goodly assembly. Conspicuous among the bevy of fair girls present when the party entered the dining-hall were Lucy Millington and Eva Walsingham.

It so happened that Lieutenant Hilton had one of the young girls on each side of him; and although he was gradually losing himself in the witchery of Lucy's smiling repartee, he could not quite ignore the fact that Eva was not only attractive in appearance, but thoroughly well informed.

On his arrival at Elsmere, where he had been invited on account of his father's intimacy with Mr. Elsmere in bygone days, he had been very much struck by Maud Elsmere's beauty.

The young officer, though willing to own that she was certainly the most beautiful girl he had seen, was nevertheless less a slave to her than to Lucy Millington. Perhaps Lucy's apparent preference for him was a balm to his feelings after Miss Elsmere's indifference; for what man does not feel a slight sense of wounded vanity after being coolly passed by as he had been.

And Lucy was too worldly-wise to let go her hold of this gay, light-hearted officer until she had been able to sound the depth of his pocket.

Dinner was over, and the evening's amusements had commenced before the arrival of Mr. Thornleigh.

No one excepting Mr. Elsmere and his daughter had known that he was expected. Perhaps it was well that they did not, otherwise they might have attributed the change in Maud Elsmere to its right cause.

Already there were wonderings whispered that the heiress was less haughty than usual on this night when for the first time she was playing the hostess as the recognized future mistress of the grand old place. There was something in her manner, they could not tell what, that made her more thoroughly lovely than they had ever seen her; and yet, in spite of the softened tenderness of expression that bathed her glorious eyes in dreamy beauty, some of those who looked at her could fancy how those same blue eyes could assume a steely look at any attempt to gain their owner's favor.

Luckily for Miss Elsmere, the guests were so struck by the announcement of the new guest's name that she was unobserved. Many present

knew the stranger by name as a railroad magnate and political power of great repute, and in their astonishment at having so eminent a personage in their midst they failed to notice the bright flush that would come into her cheeks in spite of every effort.

When, a few seconds later, the assembled company saw their young hostess exchange greetings with her guest her face was as pale as on ordinary occasions, and but few of the number noticed the slight quiver of her lips as for a moment she raised her eyelids and glanced quickly at the man whose love she felt to be hers, and whom she had during a brief visit to her aunt, Mrs. Brentwood, learned to regard as the noblest and best of his sex.

To Mrs. Millington and her daughter the entrance of this distinguished and wealthy man was as the sudden appearance of the sun among the less brilliant twinkling stars. The stars had been bright and attractive until now; but the superior position and wealth of the newly-arrived sun had thrown all other objects into the shade.

But Lucy Millington had plenty of discretion, and in the dazzling light of this unexpected luminary she did not forget that should he take his departure the former lights would be very acceptable. She therefore skillfully concealed her ambitious hopes and allowed Mr. Hilton to dance with her several times.

Meanwhile she observed Miss Elsmere closely, and once, on having an opportunity of speaking to her mother, she asked for that lady's opinion respecting the heiress and Mr. Thornleigh.

"Do you think, mamma, that she shows him any marked preference?" Lucy asked.

"No, my dear; and yet I am certain that there is something different about her this evening. As for Mr. Thornleigh, any one can see that he has eyes only for her."

But, as if to contradict her last remark, Miss Elsmere and Mr. Thornleigh came forward at that moment, the young lady saying as she did so, "Lucy, my dear, Mr. Thornleigh wishes to make your acquaintance."

She did not say, nor had Lucy the modesty to suppose, that in seeking her Mr. Thornleigh had been influenced by Miss Elsmere's accidental remark that Miss Millington had been her companion at school for six years. The feeling that causes us to envy those who have known and been intimate with our loved ones in those days when we were in ignorance of their very existence—the time which we fancy now would be unendurable if we had to live it again—had roused Mr. Thornleigh's interest in Lucy Millington; whereas she, in her girlish vanity, attributed his notice to her own superior attractions.

Never had the frivolous girl been so proud of her mother's appearance as she was then; and as Mrs. Millington gracefully bowed to the strange gentleman, the thought came into her daughter's mind that her mother's boastful remark that she was connected, though distantly, with a noble English family must surely be true, for no lady of rank could have looked more thoroughly a lady than she, in her trailing dress of black satin and beautiful lace.

The expense that had been incurred in supplying the two ladies with what Mrs. Millington deemed requisite for a proper appearance at Elsmere would swallow a year's income; but, then, what was the use of giving Lucy a brilliant training if she were to throw her chances away? The harvest-time was at hand now. Should the in-gathering be a failure from inefficient means? Decidedly no. And as the widow spoke a few well-chosen words, she noticed with delighted satisfaction that Lucy was looking the perfection of girlish innocence and sweetness.

To the mother's partial eyes, Maud's pale beauty seemed quite insignificant compared with Lucy's glowing loveliness. If only Lucy had Maud's position, or one equal to it, no man in his senses would hesitate to give her the preference.

Mr. Hilton watched the girl whose winning graciousness had made him her slave, and he began to fear that he was to have a formidable rival in Mr. Thornleigh. But after one dance with Miss Millington, he seemed willing to resign his partner.

The merry hours were passing quickly onward, and Lucy was thoroughly enjoying the young officer's company. She told herself that should he prove to be wealthy, she should prefer his debonair gayety to the more serious manner of Mr. Thornleigh.

She was somewhat disconcerted by hearing Mr. Hilton remark:

"I really believe that Mr. Thornleigh is the

veritable sunbeam that will thaw the Elsmere ice. Did you ever see our young hostess so charming? I cannot say that she devotes much time to him, and yet there is a shy softness in the way she speaks to him that quite transforms her."

"Really, Mr. Hilton, I wonder to hear you speak so coolly of what may be a serious matter, if, as would appear from your remarks, you are so ardent an admirer of the beautiful heiress," Lucy retorted.

There was a slight stress on the last word that struck rather painfully on his ears; but he laughed lightly.

"An heiress can never be anything to me," he said, quickly. "I should scorn myself if I let a rich woman's gold purchase a luxurious life for me; and, besides, is it likely that a woman in Miss Elsmere's position would ever deign to accept a poor lieutenant who has very little but his pay? Thank goodness, my heart does not lead me in that direction! But, see! there is a general move. I declare, it is nearly twelve o'clock!"

Very soon the last of the carriages that had been drawn up before the Hall doors was heard driving away.

Maud Elsmere took advantage of the lull that followed the busy task of entertaining so many guests to slip away onto the terrace that ran along the west side of the Hall. She knew that the dear old bells of the village church, that she had listened to when a child, were just commencing to repeat their yearly-told song of peace and good-will.

The full moon shone with her cold, pale gleams on Maud's upturned face, and in spite of the chill air that swept over it, that face was far from meriting its appellation of icy. The prettily-curved lips trembled, and the beautiful eyes were dim with tears.

There was much of sadness in her thoughts; yet, above all, came the remembrance that the man who had won her pure heart had come to tell of his love. She felt positive that he had thought only of her in coming to Elsmere. But she dreaded having to speak to him alone. She would go indoors, and after saying "Good-night," would hasten to her room.

She was leaning on the stone balustrade that skirted the terrace, but had raised herself ready to walk away, when she heard some one coming toward her. She did not turn round. Instinctively she knew that it was too late to fly.

"Pardon me, dear Miss Elsmere, if I intrude. I saw you leave the house, and, as I have something to say to you, I took the liberty of following you hither."

"I came to hear our dear old bells," Maud said, hurriedly, as she vainly strove to make Mr. Thornleigh forget his purpose. "I think no music equal to them; and it seemed to me, in my days of exile in my boarding school, that I longed with a longing unutterable for the old familiar sounds. To my imagination it seemed that when Orpheus succeeded in drawing

"Iron tears down Pluto's cheek,"

his strains were not more entrancing."

"It is wonderful how we cling to the memories of other days," Mr. Thornleigh said. "I remember how the bark of my favorite dog sounded in my hungry ears after my long absence from Thornleigh Towers."

There was a slight pause, and nothing broke the stillness save the ringing out of the Christmas bells.

"This is the first time that I have spent Christmas in the country since my return. I wanted this bright season to be a specially happy one, so I have come to Elsmere to see if the blessing I crave is to be mine."

He was bending low as he spoke, and his voice had sunk to a whisper. Maud was shaking from head to foot, but there was no mistaking the happy light in her eyes.

"Why did you leave Mrs. Brentwood's house so abruptly? I thought you knew that I loved you, dearest. I was terribly troubled to find that I could not see you again. This rest from that political work is most opportune. Will you not tell me now if you will accept my love, and give me—"

"Maudie, are you there, dear? I have been looking everywhere for you; then I remembered your old attachment to your sweet bells, and fancied you might be here," Lucy Millington said, as she quietly slipped her arm round Miss Elsmere's waist, looking perfectly unconscious that she had interrupted an important interview.

"I am coming in, Lucy, for I really am getting quite cold. My teeth are absolutely chattering."

But Maud's trembling hand betrayed more than cold as she drew her shawl more closely round her.

Mr. Thornleigh opened the long, low window through which he and the ladies had gained the terrace, and in a few moments he was obliged to separate from Maud without hearing her confession of love.

His feelings against Lucy may be imagined, as he quietly went to his room. He had the comfort of feeling that his darling loved him, although she had not actually said so.

CHAPTER II.

AS SEEMING FALSE AS FAIR.

"If you will be careful, Lucy, and not let that penniless young Hilton engross so much of your time, I believe you may realize my highest expectations, after all," Mrs. Millington remarked, when she and Lucy were alone, preparing for rest.

"Penniless! How do you know he is so, mamma?"

"Well, perhaps not quite penniless; but Mrs. Walsingham was speaking of him this evening, and from what she said it seems that he, his widowed mother, and a sister have all to exist on something like fifteen hundred a year. Of course, he has his pay; but I should fancy that is scarcely sufficient to pay his tailor's bill. It is a pity he is not the son, instead of the nephew, of John Hilton. I believe the son is a fine fellow. Don't you remember hearing your papa speak of him?"

"No. Did he? I have forgotten if he did. But about Mr. Thornleigh, mamma. I believe he was on the verge of proposing to Maud half an hour ago, when I interrupted them on the terrace."

"I fancied he seemed attentive to her," Mrs. Millington answered, musingly; "but considering his position, she was barely civil to him, I thought. She danced with him once, and then seemed in a hurry to leave him. Did you not hear her say he had desired to be introduced to you?"

"Yes, mamma; but"—with a sigh—"it is so hard to have no position to begin with. If I only had Maud's wealth—"

"Perhaps, if that affair of her brother's had not turned up, she might have been less attractive," the widow said, bitterly. "I wonder if Mr. Thornleigh would like to be connected with such a low person as Mrs. Elsmere. I dare say he knows very little about the matter, as he was abroad when Geoffrey took that fatal step. I should like him to know that Maud's sister-in-law is far beneath you in the social scale."

"It seems hardly fair, mamma, if you remember all we owe to Maud, that we should come between her and this man, if she really loves him."

Lucy's growing admiration for young Hilton was perhaps making her feel for others. Had she had a different prompter, she would perhaps have developed into an amiable woman.

"Stuff and nonsense!" Mrs. Millington exclaimed, angrily. "Why should she have everything, while we have nothing? Now, Lucy, do be rational! That was a clever move of yours to interrupt the *tete-a-tete*."

"I am glad you are pleased," Lucy rather coldly replied.

"The great thing is, to keep the gentleman from compromising himself until I can see a chance to enlighten him about Geoffrey's wife. It is a delicate thing to do, though," Mrs. Millington said, as Lucy turned to leave her.

On Christmas Day the household repaired to church.

Mr. Thornleigh found that he had a difficult task before him. Miss Elsmere willfully kept out of his way, and whenever she was likely to be alone with him, either Lucy or her mother was on the alert to prevent any private conversation.

Next day there was to be a skating-party, and he hoped to be able to have Maud to himself before night. He would contrive to skate away from the party, taking her with him.

Mrs. Millington was strongly inclined to believe that "fortune follows the brave," when just as Miss Elsmere was turning from speaking to her, the girl dropped a tiny note.

No scruples hindered the widow from making herself acquainted with the contents of that scrap of paper. She hastened to her room, and there, to her intense delight, read as follows:

"Meet me by the old lodge-gate at twelve to-night, Maud, dearest. The others will have retired then. I am all impatience to see you."

"G. H."

Mrs. Millington's plan was soon laid. She

must contrive to let the paper fall into Mr. Thornleigh's hands! It was not addressed, and the abrupt style in which it was written would necessitate a partial reading of it before its owner's name could be discovered. The widow hoped that he would make inquiries respecting the writer of the note, and so make himself familiar with the chapter in the Elsmere annals to which allusion was never made. She did not intend to join the skating-party; but she went down in order to see the young people set out. As she passed the breakfast-room door, she heard loud chattering and laughter.

Just then Mr. Thornleigh came out, saying as he did so, "I have a note to write, Hilton, so I must leave you to help to arrange with the ladies about to-morrow's entertainment. I am quite willing to fall in with any plans you may form."

Mrs. Millington watched him as he went to the library, and after giving him a few moments to get partly through his task, she went quietly in the same direction.

The question that was troubling her was whether he would come out from the library before any one else passed by. She knew he would use the utmost dispatch, because the ladies were already dressed for their proposed excursion. It was necessary that she should act at once; so, with a quick glance around to note if she were unobserved, she hastily dropped the unaddressed paper on the door mat.

Nothing more could be done, excepting to watch if Mr. Thornleigh removed the paper; so she took up her position at some distance, where any passer-by would suppose her to be lost in admiration of the view to be obtained from a long, narrow window, by the side of which a full-length statue hid her from the notice of any one passing to or from the library.

She had not long to wait. Mr. Thornleigh came quickly out, and saw the note. Perhaps he fancied he had dropped it himself. At any rate, he picked it up, and then went to his dressing-room.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Millington saw him take his place in the wagonette that was to carry the party to the lake.

His face was pale; but the widow, even in her hardness of heart, would have been moved, could she have known the anguish which was the cause of that calm pallor.

She had only meant to excite his suspicions concerning Miss Elsmere's brother. It never occurred to her that, having little or no knowledge of recent events in the Elsmere family, he would be ignorant of Geoffrey's very existence. Had she thought of such a probability she would at once have known what interpretation he would give to those few penciled words; as it was, she fancied there could be but one construction to be put upon them.

She was rather uneasy in her mind, but all uneasiness was put to flight as she noticed that, although Mr. Hilton sat on Lucy's left, Mr. Thornleigh was on her right, while Miss Elsmere, with slightly flushed cheeks, was chattering gayly to the young rector of the church.

The skating was not very enjoyable, after all. A thaw had set in, and some of the weather-wise farmers predicted that it would rain before night; so, instead of keeping up the amusement by torchlight, as had been intended, Miss Elsmere proposed to return home for five o'clock tea.

She was not very happy, for although she had avoided Mr. Thornleigh, she did not like the turn affairs had taken; and she was quite convinced in her own mind that he was avoiding her.

Could it be possible that he was yielding to the witchery of Lucy Millington's manner?

Maud had much to trouble her just then; but her friends had no reason to suspect that such was the case.

The young hostess was determined to let nothing interfere with her duty to her father's guests. So, through the long hours of that winter evening, she maintained her character by her cheerful winning graciousness, although she longed intensely for the time when she could put off the restraint that was on her, and give way to the feelings she was so painfully controlling.

A calm stillness seemed to pervade Elsmere Hall in its quiet embrace. To all outward appearance the whole household slept. But appearances are ever deceitful, and in this case they were proved to be so.

A slight, dark figure stepped out from a conservatory that hid the old garden from the part of the grounds that were laid out in modern style.

There had been a slight shower, and the clouds hurrying past the moon seemed to tell of more rain. But the slight girlish figure went quickly on until the old lodge-gate was gained. Then she was eagerly clasped and kissed by a tall, bearded man. The light was not bright, and the silent watcher in the conservatory had no means of identifying the man; but he had seen quite enough to satisfy him that Maud Elsmere had stolen out like a thief from her father's house, and had, by appointment, met some one clandestinely.

"Heaven forgive me if I have acted meanly!" he muttered to himself as he went to his room. "Until now I thought there was some mistake. Oh, Maud, Maud! I could not have believed it had my own eyes not seen! And I was fool enough to think she loved me!"

In the mean time Miss Elsmere was learning what had induced her brother to seek his home after three years of banishment.

Since his marriage he had never set foot on his father's estate until now; and Maud had never seen him during those three dreary years. But, in spite of her pride, Miss Elsmere was deeply attached to her brother, and she had some feeling of compunction on the ground that it was through her that he and his wife—then Elsie Barton—had become acquainted.

The introduction had taken place one holiday time when Mrs. Brentwood had taken Maud to Newport for a few weeks. Geoffrey Elsmere was then at Harvard; but he went down to Newport to see his sister before her return to school. She had gone down to the beach when Geoffrey reached the hotel where Mrs. Brentwood had taken up her quarters, and Geoffrey, full of impatience to see his sister, went in search of her.

He never forgot the happiness that came to him that day when he found Maud, for by her side was seated a simply-dressed golden-haired girl, with a sweet flower-like face, to whom his heart was drawn as if by some subtle charm.

"This is my brother Geoffrey, Elsie," Maud explained. "Isn't it strange, Geoffrey, that I should see Miss Barton here? She was living at Astoria when she last wrote to me, at school, but has recently removed here with Mrs. Barton and is earning her living by teaching music. You have heard me speak of Elsie Barton, the late Doctor Barton's adopted daughter, Geoffrey? She was with me till last term at Madame D'Arcy's."

And that was how Geoffrey Elsmere met his fate.

Mrs. Barton, Elsie's adopted mother, was not aware, until the girl's happiness was at stake, that matters had gone so far. Then she opposed their union. But Elsie, although greatly attached to the kind-hearted lady who had always been as a mother to her, was resolute in one thing—she would not give up her lover; and after much weeping and entreating on both sides, Mrs. Barton consented, though reluctantly, to let her darling go.

Mr. Elsmere refused to see or hear from Geoffrey after the marriage had taken place. It was nonsense for Geoffrey to urge that Elsie was a lady; she was a poor girl, a music-teacher—which was quite sufficient to condemn her in Mr. Elsmere's eyes. And she was actually unaware of what or who she was anyway! It was nonsense for Geoffrey to urge that Mrs. Barton had reason to believe that Elsie was well born. She could give no proof at all. Indeed, she could say little more than that Elsie's mother—who was a stranger to her—had died when the girl was born, to the inexpressible grief of her young husband, who after her death had gone away into foreign lands, leaving a sum of money for the child's maintenance.

However, Geoffrey Elsmere was satisfied that Elsie was the only girl he could marry, so he married her, and set to work in earnest to support her.

For more than two years he had been able, by acting as foreign correspondent to a large firm, to earn sufficient to keep himself and Elsie from want. Then the firm had failed, and the young husband found how hard a thing it was to see his wife suffering from privation at a time when she needed support; and in the bitter winter time, when so much was needed for fuel, the last bill was changed to provide absolute necessities for the girl-wife and her infant boy. It was in this strait that Geoffrey resolved to go to Maud for help.

"I would not ask for myself, dear," he said, humbly, "but it is for Elsie and her boy."

"Hush, Geoffrey!" and Maud Elsmere drew the face that had grown thin and haggard against her own. "Tell me about the boy."

"He is a fine fellow, Maudie; and Elsie has

decided to give him the old name. So he will be christened Geoffrey."

"Poor Elsie! Give her my best love, Geoffrey. Tell her that I shall be in New York shortly, and that I will contrive to see her. In the mean time give her this for my nephew." And Maud drew a small, well-filled purse from her pocket. "I must not remain here, dear brother. How I wish this was at an end! I long to see you in your old place again."

"That is like you, Maudie. You deserve to be heiress of Elsmere, and I do not envy you but for the sake of my wife and helpless child. But you are shivering."

"I will go in now, Geoffrey. But how shall you return?"

"I can catch the early express, dear. Do not trouble about me. I am anxious to get back to poor Elsie."

With a loving and grateful kiss, Geoffrey turned away, never even stopping to glance at the home that for years he had looked upon as his rightful heritage.

It was breakfast time at Elsmere when Mr. Elsmere announced that Mr. Thornleigh had been suddenly called away from the Hall. Mrs. Millington wondered if there had been any unpleasant disclosures respecting the marriage of young Elsmere; if so, his father's countenance did not betray him.

Maud was, to all appearance, quite unconcerned respecting their guest's movements. Certainly she looked rather weary; but then Mrs. Millington thought she could account for that by the knowledge she had of the midnight appointment. She would have thought differently had she seen Miss Elsmere early that morning when she received from her maid a note that had been sent in by Mr. Thornleigh's valet. It was very brief.

"The inclosed note, which accidentally came into my possession, will explain why I cannot see you again. It is bad enough to think of you as I now do, without having the additional pain of seeing you. Oh, Maud, Maud! why did you act so deceitfully?"

ROYAL THORNLEIGH.

In speechless agony Maud opened her brother's note. This, then, was what had driven her lover away. She had not thought that he would have been so hard on her for seeing Geoffrey, although, in doing so, she was obliged to deceive her father.

Presently indignation overcame every other feeling. She had given this man no right to censure her—that was a soothing reflection. How, then, did he presume to act so? She would not repine for one who had so easily been induced to give up wooing her. There was no time for quiet, calm reflection. The breakfast-bell would soon ring.

In a few minutes' time she had written a freezing reply to Mr. Thornleigh's outburst.

"He will not think I am disconsolate after that," she thought, as she read what she had written. "Next time he confesses his love to a lady he will do well to be sure of her answer before assuming so much."

The quiet, stony calm that deceived Mrs. Millington lasted through the day. It was not until evening that Miss Elsmere's sorrowful anger found relief in tears. Then for a few days nothing happened to break the quiet monotony of life at the Hall.

Lucy Millington began to fear that her chance of meeting Mr. Thornleigh again was rather doubtful, and in the absence of other occupation she gave herself up to the selfish pleasure of encouraging Mr. Hilton's attentions, when she well knew she could not give him anything in return.

But this state of things could not continue; and one morning, when the thoughtless girl had consented to walk in the lane where a sharp frost after the recent rains had made it necessary that she should accept Mr. Hilton's services to insure a safe progress—the young officer told her of his love, and asked her to promise to be his at some future day when he should have a home provided for her.

He looked so brave and handsome, with admiration lighting his eyes, that Lucy felt it difficult to refuse him. In every way he seemed so desirable—excepting in that one essential—that she pitied both herself and him.

The ardent young lover had been quite sure of success. Lucy's manner had given him hope from the very first, and her answer that she was very poor, and could not therefore marry poverty, came like a thunderclap. He stood quite still, and turned so as to look her full in the face.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have been trifling with me? That you have been leading

me on only to throw me over? You cannot, surely, be so base?"

Lucy tried first by arguing, then by smiling banter, to calm the angry man; but the little gestures that had once filled him with admiration, now added to the contempt he felt for her.

"You have until this moment appeared to me as a pure-hearted, innocent girl," he said, scornfully. "Now I have no words to express what I feel for the heartless woman who, while determined to marry a rich man, trifles with the affections of a poor one. It was the innocent child I deemed you that I loved—not your own mean, despicable self!"

How the pair would have managed to walk back to the house in the uncomfortable frame of mind that the young officer's words produced was not put to the test, for, to Lucy's intense relief, Miss Elsmere came in sight, driving her ponies.

"I am going home, Lucy. The roads seem quite unsafe. May I give you a lift?" she asked.

"Thanks; yes. We were just about to return," Lucy said.

But as she took her seat beside Maud, Mr. Hilton walked away in the direction of the stables.

If his manner was noticed by Maud, she made no comment. She was beginning to fancy that everything was wrong, and nothing would henceforth astonish her very much.

CHAPTER III.

FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE.

"TAKE my arm, Eva. I declare I can scarcely keep on my feet. I am glad your mamma did not venture out."

"So am I, papa; although she is missing a treat. The fields look like plains of crystal. It is a pity that Miss Elsmere's skating-party was not put off until now; the weather is glorious!"

Mr. Walsingham smiled at his daughter's enthusiasm.

"If we could walk briskly it would be more enjoyable," he said. "Sleighs or skates seem necessary to safe locomotion just now."

"I should like to go over to Elsmere before the frost goes," Eva remarked. "I fancy the young people will be visiting the pond again."

"I dare say I could drive you over," her father said, after a slight pause; "but it would be unsafe to take any horse but old Derby, and your mamma would fidget if we were to venture out behind a spirited animal."

She was looking very pretty in her dark velvet dress and soft furs. The keen air gave a brighter tinge than usual to her cheeks; and her hazel eyes shone with enjoyment of the present and happy anticipation of the future.

Even to herself Eva had scarcely admitted that she felt interested in Herbert Hilton. Yet the prospect of seeing him again made the intended visit to Elsmere Hall very inviting, although the young officer never paid her any special attention, unless, as sometimes happened Mr. Thornleigh had Lucy Millington at his side.

But Mr. Walsingham had heard of his sudden departure, and as Eva thought that Mr. Hilton would have no one to come between him and Lucy, the bright look became more subdued.

"Halloa! what on earth is the matter?" And Mr. Walsingham quickly jumped over the fence that separated the field-path from the road. A horse had dashed past at a terrific rate, just as Eva and her father reached the road.

"By Jove, he's down!" And without waiting to give Eva a helping hand, the old gentleman went as rapidly as he could to render assistance to the fallen horseman.

Quick as he was, Eva had reached his side before he had gained the side of the prostrate man. Eva had known from the moment when horse and rider had gone madly by that the gentleman was Mr. Hilton. In the distance, some laborers had contrived to arrest the flight of the frightened horse, so that Mr. Walsingham and Eva gave their undivided attention to the unfortunate young officer.

"He is quite stunned, Eva, and we have no means of restoring him. Some of these men will help me to convey him to our house. It will require caution, for the roads are so bad, and as there are only three men, I do not see how any one can be spared. I am afraid to let you go, Eva, and yet it may be a case of life and—"

"Oh, I can go, papa! You need not fear."

You want to send home to tell some one to go for a doctor? I can manage all; everything will be in readiness when you come."

"Be careful, child. You look quite frightened; but I know I can trust you."

In less time than Mr. Walsingham could have deemed it possible, Eva was at home.

Her mother was startled at first to see her without her father; but Eva briefly explained matters. Mrs. Walsingham was a helpless sort of woman, but her daughter was a host in herself.

A message was sent to the nearest doctor, and two man-servants, carrying warm rugs and a flask of brandy, was sent to render assistance to those already engaged in doing their best to carry Mr. Hilton's prostrate form to The Willows—Eva's home.

The time seemed very long to the anxious girl before her father and his hearty co-operators arrived. She had caused a fire to be made, and everything prepared for the reception of the injured man; and when Mr. Walsingham appeared, he saw at once that, as she had said, everything was in readiness.

In less than an hour the doctor had pronounced the injuries to be serious. There was, in addition to a broken leg, a fracture of the skull.

When everything that skill and kindness could do had been done to relieve the poor fellow, Eva suggested that Mr. Elsmere should be apprised of what had happened.

"To be sure; he ought to know at once. Though, now I think of it, the man who took the fiery brute, Sultan, home would tell what had occurred. Still, it would only be polite to send to Elsmere Hall."

A note was hastily dispatched; but before the man had gone many yards he met Mr. Elsmere himself. He quickly scanned the note, and then, dismounting, entered the house.

"This is a sad business, Walsingham," he said, as that gentleman met him in the hall. "Does Sabin think seriously of that head-wound?"

"That is the worst part of the business. He says there is danger; but the case is not hopeless."

"Then I think his mother should be told. She is in delicate health, poor lady; so I will not alarm her unnecessarily. A letter will not look so ominous as a telegram, and I think it will be as well to say nothing about that nasty skull fracture; the broken leg will suggest quite enough danger to her mind, poor soul! especially as she is unable to come to his help."

Eva had been listening breathlessly. "He has a sister, has he not, Mr. Elsmere? Perhaps she would like to come."

"I think, my dear," Mr. Elsmere said, with unusual gentleness, "that perhaps you could send a tiny note to the sister. You will say what is needed more tenderly than I can, and be able to convey to her mind that although there is no great danger, you will welcome her gladly if she thinks her presence would comfort her brother."

"I will do anything you advise, dear Mr. Elsmere," Eva eagerly returned.

And the gentlemen both noticed how her hands trembled as she sat down to execute his wishes.

"However the poor fellow could have been so mad as to mount Sultan when the ground is simply a sheet of ice, puzzles me! It is my opinion that he has been annoyed in some way. I saw him laughing merrily with that light-hearted friend of Maud's—Lucy Millington, I mean—this morning; and not half an hour later he was as pale as death, and went to the stables in a state of great excitement. Tomkins says he never saw a man so determined to have his way. Nothing would keep him from mounting Sultan."

Mr. Elsmere had been speaking in an undertone to Mr. Walsingham; but Eva heard enough to convince her that Lucy had been to blame.

"If ever there is mischief, a woman is sure to be at the bottom of it," Mr. Walsingham remarked. "But as for Miss Millington, she looks quite a child."

"If matters are as I fear," the other returned, "she is woman enough to know how to trifle with a man's love. She has encouraged him openly, and if she has fooled him she is no longer worthy of my daughter's friendship."

"It may not be so bad as you think," Mr. Walsingham said.

He was a peace-loving man, and did not like the frown that had settled on his friend's face.

"I hope you may be right; but Herbert Hilton is dear to me for his father's sake; and that this

evil should have fallen on him while visiting Elsmere troubles me greatly."

When he returned home in the evening he was convinced of the truth of his suspicions. He felt weary, and before removing his riding-dress lay down on a couch in one of the drawing-rooms. A curtain separated this room from the adjoining one. There had formerly been a sliding partition, but Maud had persuaded her father to substitute gracefully falling curtains.

For some time Mr. Elsmere lay dozing; then, while he was dimly conscious, he heard voices. For some moments he gave no heed, and the voices had no meaning to him.

Suddenly he was aroused by hearing an angry voice exclaiming, "I tell you, mamma, it was my fault. I told him I could not marry a poor man. If only he was wealthy I would thankfully marry him. He is a thousand times more lovable than Mr. Thornleigh!"

"Rubbish, Lucy! Don't talk to me about love!"

Mr. Elsmere started to his feet. He had not intended to overhear the conversation between mother and daughter. He went softly out of the room, and at his earliest opportunity spoke to Maud on the subject.

"You will not desire them to prolong their stay as you intended, my dear?" he asked, after detailing all he knew.

"Certainly not, papa; although I cannot help thinking that Lucy, left to her better impulses, would act differently."

"I know you always find 'extenuating circumstances,' Maudie," her father said, with his rare smile.

And then he went to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER IV.

A MINISTERING ANGEL.

"HERE comes the postman, mamma! I hope Bertie has written."

"We ought not to expect it," the mother returned, although the hope was echoed in her own breast. "He has so much to think of now. Poor boy! how I wish he could always have his days as bright as these late ones have been."

And Mrs. Hilton sighed as she waited in eager anticipation of what news the mail had brought.

As Miss Hilton took the letter—there was only one—from the neat little maid, who, with an elderly domestic, constituted the whole retinue of the modest little *menage*, an expression of surprise flitted across her face.

"The letter is from Elsmere; but the writing is not Bertie's, mamma. I almost think it is Mr. Elsmere's."

Mrs. Hilton looked anxiously at the address. Her face paled even to the lips.

"It is from Mr. Elsmere, Florrie. What can be the matter?"

The young lady took the letter from her mother's hands.

"I will open it, dear mamma," she said, gently.

For a few moments the elderly lady did not speak.

At one glance the daughter saw that something was wrong; but knowing how excitement would tell on her mother's delicate frame, she said, quietly:

"It is nothing very serious, mamma; but I will read it to you. Bertie has had a fall, and"—reading hurriedly to get at the gist of the matter—"has injured his leg. I will read what Mr. Elsmere says, mamma," the young girl went on bravely, knowing that suspense would be worse than anything to the poor invalid.

And very soon the widow knew the extent of the injuries, so far as the gentleman had deemed it wise to enlighten her.

"Here is also a note to myself in a lady's handwriting, mamma—from Miss Elsmere, I suppose. No; it is from some strange lady—'Eva Walsingham,' she signs herself. Listen, mamma:

"DEAR MISS HILTON:—

"Mr. Elsmere is writing to tell you of the accident that has happened to your brother, Lieutenant Hilton; so I am sending to let you know that you need not feel anxious on his account, if you cannot conveniently come to see him. Mamma and I will nurse him as though he were our own. He has been brought to our house, as he fell near here. But, dear Miss Hilton, if it would comfort you and Mrs. Hilton to see for yourself how he is, do not hesitate to come. I know people often exaggerate danger when they cannot see what is going on; so if Mrs. Hilton's health will permit of your absence for a few days, will you let me know, and I will meet you at the station. At the same time, I should like Mrs. Hilton to rest assured that there is no absolute

danger, and that I will send daily to inform her of her son's state, unless you come; when, of course, you will take that responsibility.

"I am, dear Miss Hilton,
Yours sincerely,
EVA WALSHINGHAM."

"What a dear, thoughtful girl, mamma! It is well that Bertie is among such kind friends."

"I should like you to go, Florrie," Mrs. Hilton said, speaking for the first time. "Bertie will like to see some one belonging to him now he is suffering."

"But how can I leave you, dear mamma?" the girl asked, anxiously.

The mother smiled bravely.

"How can you ask that of a soldier's wife?"—she never spoke of herself as a widow. "Surely I can be content to accept Maria's services for a time. I shall not feel happy unless you go. Maria must travel with you, and return to-morrow. I am glad I am not dressed. I shall remain in bed to-day and to-morrow until Maria's return; for the rest, Jane can manage nicely."

It was useless for Florence to argue that she could travel alone. Mrs. Hilton was firm. So a telegram was dispatched to The Willows, and after making every possible arrangement for the widow's comfort, Miss Hilton prepared to make the journey to Elsmere accompanied by the respectable-looking middle-aged woman who had lived with Mrs. Hilton during the happy wifehood that had been suddenly put an end to ten years ago. Never during those long years had Mrs. Hilton been left by the faithful servant and loving daughter; but this was an exceptional case, and the two tender nurses decided that to persist in remaining would only aggravate the poor mother's distress. The young servant-maid felt the gravity of her responsibility when, after listening to a multitude of directions, she saw Maria follow Miss Hilton into a hack.

"Is that you, Flora? Where am I? Have I been ill?" And Lieutenant Hilton tried to raise himself in bed, but was held prisoner by weakness and by a strange, fettered feeling about his right leg.

"Yes, dear," his sister returned, answering his last query first. "Your leg has been injured by a fall. Do you not remember your ride on Sultan?"

A spasm of pain seemed to contract the muscles of the face, and he raised his hand to his head.

"I remember," he said. "What ails my head, Florrie?"

"It was bruised by the fall, dear, and you have been unconscious; but, dear Bertie, you must not talk."

"Only tell me where I am, and about my mother," he entreated, in a weak voice. "When did you leave her?"

Florrie explained how she had been at The Willows for three weeks, and that her mother would not hear of her return until he should be pronounced convalescent.

"So you must be obedient, Bertie, and try your utmost to get well speedily," she added, cheerfully.

And Herbert Hilton did not know how near he had been to the verge of eternity, nor how, in those weeks of anxiety, his sister and Eva Walsingham had been drawn, by a common feeling of miserable suspense, into a close bond of friendship.

To Florence Hilton the conviction that Bertie was very dear to the sweet, brown-eyed girl had gradually deepened. She did not know then of the blow he had received from Lucy Millington's cruel hands; and she wondered in those first days of returning strength, when Eva spoke to him so tremulously, that he did not perceive how his well-being affected her.

Gradually the young officer's health improved and with the first ray of joyous certainty that such was the case, Eva's manner underwent a change. Florence Hilton involuntarily respected the womanliness that hid from Herbert's eyes the love which he had no wish to discover. It was from her brother's own lips that Florence heard of Lucy Millington's rejection of him.

"I have made up my mind to explain why I was so mad as to run headlong into this trouble," he said one day, when Florence sat beside his couch, embroidering some lace which she intended as a parting gift to Eva. "Have you ever seen Lucy Millington?" he asked, abruptly.

"You mean the pretty, childish-looking girl I met on the day I came here? She and her mother were leaving Elsmere, and were taking tickets at the station as I came here."

"Then you know what reason I had to be deceived in supposing her a pure-minded, innocent girl, instead of the mercenary, unwomanly wretch she has proved. She refused me on account of my lack of wealth, Florrie."

His sister kissed him tenderly. She was his senior by two years, and had always felt the importance of those two years in spite of her brother's stalwart appearance.

"I hope the knowledge of her treachery has not come too late," she said, gently.

"It has come in time to cure me entirely of the illusion that has made me so irrational," he said, gravely. "It is impossible for me to love any but a pure, good woman," he added.

And Florence wondered if the time would ever come when he would know of, and appreciate, the blessing which was so near at hand.

Two days later Florence Hilton returned home, traveling this time with Mr. and Miss Elsmere, who were about to spend some weeks at Mrs. Brentwood's town residence. Herbert Hilton was to remain a few weeks longer, as the doctor thought the journey would be too trying for him, and Mr. Walsingham was so urgent, that Florence used her influence to induce her brother to consent to prolong his stay.

Perhaps she hoped that he would see more of Eva, and would learn to value her sweet, lovable character; but she was careful not to say a word that should betray what she suspected of Eva's feeling for her brother.

If Florence had hoped for good news in this quarter, she felt sadly disappointed when she met her brother a fortnight later.

He seemed sad and weary, and there was evidently nothing to communicate. Yet, in spite of his assertion that he was cured of his passion for Lucy Millington, he was often moody and absent-minded. Only in his mother's presence did he seem anything like the Bertie of old. No selfish emotions caused him to appear sad and gloomy when with her. She had enough to bear without having the shadow of his petty cares thrown over her, he told himself, as he patiently told her, over and over again, the story of his accident.

There was one thing that struck Florence. Whenever he spoke of the Walsinghams, he never alluded to Eva; and when Mrs. Hilton spoke of her gratitude to that young lady, and her urgent wish to be able to see and thank her personally, a bright flush came into Herbert's face, but he made no remark.

CHAPTER V.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

"Isn't he a beauty, Maud?"—and pale, fragile-looking Elsie Elsmere looked in proud, happy delight at the pretty picture presented by Maud and her nephew on their first acquaintance.

Maud's eyes filled with tears.

"There is a picture of mamma in papa's bedroom. It was painted when she was only three years old, and the likeness between these tiny features and hers is most striking," she said, brokenly, as at intervals she paused to kiss the pouting baby lips.

"Geoffrey thinks baby like your mother, dear," the young mother exclaimed, delightedly. "How I wish she had lived, Maudie! Perhaps she would have influenced your father, and softened him toward my poor husband."

And Mrs. Elsmere's voice trembled pityfully.

"If any one could have done so it was she," Maud said, in a low tone. "Oh, Elsie! why are men so hard?" she went on, passionately. "It seems that they are always ready to condemn us," she added, angrily, as the thought of Mr. Thornleigh came into her mind; indeed, the thought of him was seldom absent.

A cry from the baby, who was alarmed at the sudden change in her aunt's tones, changed the conversation, and before the subject was resumed, Geoffrey Elsmere came in.

He was looking pale and careworn; but his face lighted visibly on seeing his sister.

"This is kind of you, Maudie! How did you get away, dear?"

"Papa had to transact some business, so I called a carriage and drove here. He has not the remotest idea that I am acquainted with your whereabouts, unless—"

She paused, and colored painfully.

"Unless what, dear?" Geoffrey asked anxiously.

"I was thinking—but he could not be so mean!" she said, as if speaking to herself. "You know, Geoffrey, that night when you came to Elsmere, one of the visitors found the note you sent me. He returned it next day."

"Who was he, Maud? What did he say?"

"He blamed me very much for deceiving my father; but he had no right to speak so," and

Maud drew herself up haughtily. "It was Mr. Thornleigh, Geoffrey."

And in spite of herself the tell-tale color came to her face.

"The fact that he returned the note shows that he does not intend to betray us; but how came he to read it?" Geoffrey asked.

"It was unaddressed. Do you remember how it ran?"

Mr. Elsmere shook his head; and Maud gave the contents verbatim.

Her brother looked grave.

"Maudie, my dear sister, I hope I have not brought any additional unhappiness on you?" he said, earnestly. "Does Mr. Thornleigh know my unfortunate story?"

"Of course he does! Everybody knows it. Didn't the whole land ring with the most trifling details?"

"That is true," her brother returned.

"But, Geoffrey," the girl went on, after a pause, "there is one fact I have overlooked. He was abroad at the time. He has only been back a few months, after an absence of some length."

"Then, my dear, depend upon it he did not know I was your brother."

Maud turned pale as she thought for the first time of the real purport of Mr. Thornleigh's note. A sudden sickness and dizziness seized her, but she could not let these dear ones see her misery.

"Perhaps so, Geoffrey; and if so, there is no fear that he will enlighten papa."

But the cold hard tones did not deceive Mr. Elsmere nor his wife, who sat looking wistfully from her husband's grave face to the pale and now careworn one of his beautiful sister.

Miss Elsmere's stay was necessarily short, and no further allusion was made to Mr. Thornleigh's mistake; but after her departure husband and wife talked the matter over, and prayed earnestly that their darling sister might be spared from a life of suffering through their unfortunate but never regretted union.

During the next few weeks Maud met Mr. Thornleigh frequently. Her manner toward gentlemen was proverbially cold; but to Mr. Thornleigh she appeared a positive iceberg. No allusion was made to any former intimacy. Indeed, the beautiful girl might never have seen him before, so little did she regard his presence.

His altered appearance was not lost upon her; but what pity could she feel for the man who had judged her so hardly? She had not thought it possible that any man could have imputed such baseness to her; and that this man to whom she had given her heart's best love, should do so, filled her with most acute pain and anguish. Yet she could not shut him out of her heart. Strive as she would for peace and contentment, it would not come, and daily she longed for the quiet of home. But the days dragged wearily by, and no ease came to the weary, heart-broken girl.

Mr. Thornleigh was often seen, during the time of his stay in London, in company with Mr. Arthur Cleveland. Report said that the latter—a man of somewhere about forty years of age—had become strongly attached to the younger man while wandering about in foreign lands, when a virulent fever had laid its poisonous hand on the elder man where little help could be obtained for him, and he must have died but for the untiring efforts of Mr. Thornleigh, who in turn took the dreadful disease, but less severely than his friend had done. At all events, there was some strong sympathy between the two men, in spite of the difference of years in their age.

Mr. Thornleigh was sauntering one afternoon, about the end of February, near the entrance to Central Park near Fifth Avenue side, in the hope of seeing Mrs. Brentwood's carriage drive past. He tried to excuse himself by thinking that he had heard one of the gentlemen at his club speak in rapturous tones of her new and elegant "turn-out," but in reality he knew well that, should the much-admired equipage come in sight, it would have no attraction for him but for the pale, marble-like face that he longed to see therein, in spite of the evil things which circumstances had led him to impute to its owner.

He had passed and repassed the entrance several times, when he suddenly encountered Mr. Cleveland, who was looking pale and excited.

"Will you come home with me, Thornleigh? I am in need of advice, and perhaps you can help me."

"All right. But let us drive; here is a car-

riage," Thornleigh returned, wishing to screen his friend from observation.

In less than ten minutes the two men were seated in a room of a somewhat nondescript character, where Mr. Cleveland spent much of his time when in-doors.

"I have a long and painful story to tell you, Thornleigh; but I know I can count on your forbearance, and it may be that you can see some way out of my difficulty," the agitated man began.

"I most sincerely hope I may do so. But pray go on!"

"Well, then, you know, Thornleigh, that I am a widower; but you have never heard the history of my marriage. It is necessary now that that history should be made known. My father was married twice. He had several children; but they all, with the solitary exception of myself, died in their infancy. You can imagine what hopes centered in me, the son of his old age. From my earliest childhood, every one who approached me seemed to have but one idea—that I should be impressed with a sense of my own importance. Unfortunately for the carrying out of my father's bright and ambitious designs with regard to his son and heir, I was of a quiet, retiring disposition, and had no regard for my position in society, and undervalued the benefits to which I was born. My love of study was not displeasing to my father, as he hoped to see me a leader of statesmen; but in this, too, he was doomed to disappointment. My studies had more to do with the fine arts than with political intrigue.

"It was pitiful to see how anxiously he watched my progress toward manhood; and although I knew how he suffered constantly at seeing me so unlike what he had hoped, I always received the utmost kindness and consideration from his hands. I spent much time in a delightful studio which my father had caused to be fitted with every appliance and comfort, although he had no sympathy with my love of painting.

"In the weary years that have passed since my father's lavish gifts were so heaped upon me, I have often realized how selfish I was to leave home for weeks at a time, in search of beautiful and picturesque scenery, while he—poor lonely man!—was left all alone in the solitude of Clifton Grange. He was getting very frail and infirm; but the knowledge that I had disappointed him so greatly always chilled me in spite of his affection, and my short sojourns at the Grange were always more or less painful to me.

"You will understand, Thornleigh, that under the circumstances I did not care to be recognized, and on that account I traveled incognito, simply calling myself Arthur Clifton.

"It was during one of my tours that I met with Edith Brownlow, a clergyman's orphan, who, with two little pupils, was spending a few weeks at a farm-house on the banks of the beautiful Hudson. I need not tell you of the delightful time that followed.

"Three months later I married the lovely governess, and took a pretty little villa residence within view of the Catskills, and there spent the only happy days of my married life.

"I told Edith, after our marriage, that my father was wealthy, but I did not enlighten her as to his real position. She was so entirely happy that I did not wish to trouble her with fears concerning me.

"Three times during the next half-year I visited my father. Sometimes I felt strongly impelled to make a clean breast of it, and abide by the consequences, but the sight of my father getting gradually weaker deterred me.

"Why should he know that I had, even in marrying, gone in direct opposition to his wishes?

"I took every precaution to prevent the news from reaching him, and laid no end of plans to make it appear that I was, as usual, moving about from place to place.

"My only excuse for the deception I practiced was that I meant to spare my father. I had nothing to fear—in a pecuniary sense—from his anger, for even had he chosen to disown me, and to leave me none of his vast wealth, I still had an ample fortune bequeathed to me by my maternal grandfather.

"I tell you this, Thornleigh, because I value your esteem, and would not appear more culpable in your sight than I really was; so pardon the digression."

Having received an assurance of Thornleigh's sympathy, Mr. Cleveland resumed:

"It was about three weeks after my last visit to my home that I learned that my father had become alarmingly ill. The fact was first

conveyed to me through the medium of the daily papers.

"I told Edith that I had had news of my father's illness, and would hasten home. She was in delicate health just then, or I should have been inclined to take her to New York, and leave her there while I proceeded homeward, but I considered that she was unfit to travel.

"She looked pale and anxious while I was preparing to depart, but tried to appear brave. I told her that, as usual, she had better not write to my father's house, but in case of anything special, I desired, as usual, to be written to at a post-office some miles from Clifton Grange.

"Just then I had a special horror of my affairs being made public, but as Edith cheerfully complied with my wishes I went away without much fear.

"Three days after my arrival at my old home my poor father died, and I was unutterably thankful to be able to be with him at the last.

"I wrote a few hurried lines to my wife, telling her that I should be compelled to remain away for another week, so as to attend my father's funeral.

"There was no letter from Edith when I called at the little country post-office, so I went quietly about the arrangements for the sad ceremony; and the days went slowly and gloomily by.

"There was no opportunity for me to visit the post-office again until the day after the funeral.

"Judge, then, of my horror on finding a note from Edith's doctor, urging me to return at once, as my wife was very dangerously ill. The letter had arrived on the very next day to the one on which I had called at the office. I was nearly frantic. During the whole of that wretched journey I was full of remorse. My father's dying eyes seemed to haunt me and mock at my misery. I think I was almost insane when I reached the little mountain village where I had left Edith."

Mr. Cleveland's utterance was almost inaudible, and his friend interposed here to induce him to pause.

"No; I prefer to tell all now," he said, with an effort to control himself.

"I cannot remember all that followed. I remember somebody showed me Edith's empty room, then her baby-girl, from whom I turned in horror, knowing that her birth had robbed me of my darling wife. They told me how, when she first became ill, she would not have me summoned; I had sorrow enough, she said. It was not until the last, when she knew she was dying, that she had given the address to the doctor. In less than an hour she was dead.

"Strange and grave fears came into the doctor's mind then; but his wife, who had buried her only child a few weeks before, took the poor new-born babe to her home. Nothing remained to me of the beautiful wife I had left not a fortnight before but a newly-made grave, and in her stead a puny, pale-faced infant.

"I was ill for many days. Then I left the child with the kind-hearted wife of the village doctor, and went back to the Grange, to make arrangements for a long absence from home. I went to see my child before I left America, not so much because I had a desire to see her, as that something was of necessity obliged to be settled respecting her.

"I had no intention now of proclaiming my miserable story. Society gossip was always hateful to me; now more so than ever. I found that the child had 'taken to' the friend whom chance had put in our way, and as the doctor was very poor, getting only a scanty livelihood for his kindly-administered services, for the people among whom he practiced were poor, the offer I made to the kind-hearted couple to keep the child for a liberal allowance was gladly accepted.

"I told the doctor, under promise of secrecy, that Clifton was not my surname—I was christened Arthur Clifton, you know—and disclosed, to his amazement, my name and position. How faithfully he respected my wishes I afterward found to my cost. When, after ten years of wandering over greater part of the inhabited globe, I felt weary of foreign ways, and came back intending to claim my child and settle down at home, the greatest disappointment awaited me.

"The good doctor had been dead five years—thrown from his gig and killed instantly—and after three years of waiting, his widow had gone away to some place where she could keep a boarding-house.

"The rector to whom I applied was under the impression that she had gone to Brooklyn, or somewhere in that part of Long Island; but he was rather an eccentric character, and not very much given to trouble his head about his parishioners. He remembered the widow and 'her little girl' quite well, he said. They used to sit in the pew next the one where his sisters used to have 'sittings' before they were married and went away. That was all he could tell me.

"I advertised for months in all the leading papers and visited town after town, taking Brooklyn as the starting point, but with no result save continued failure.

"Thornleigh, I cannot tell you how wretched I have been all these years. Abroad and at home my wife's sweet face seems to haunt my dreams and urge me to find our child. I am perfectly sincere when I tell you that I would willingly forfeit my inheritance to find my little daughter.

"To-day, for the first time, I have learned more of her history. I was looking at the brilliant crowd who were thronging the park, when suddenly a woman touched my arm. I looked at her rather absently, but was roused by her query—"I am not mistaken, I believe; you are Mr. Arthur Clifton?"

"In a moment the truth dawned on me.

"And you are Mrs. Barton. Where is my child?" I asked, eagerly.

"That, sir, I cannot tell; but will you walk this way, and I will tell you all I know," she added. And in spite of the numb feeling that seized me as she spoke, I noticed that she was pale and trembling.

"As soon as she had moved away from the throng of loiterers, Mrs. Barton told me the sequel to what I had learned on my return to New York, ten years ago.

"On the death of her husband, she had been quite at a loss to know how to act. She had never sought to force her husband to betray Mr. Clifton's confidence; and he had never given her any account of what had transpired in making arrangements with me. The only reference he had ever made to my position was when he once spoke of the child's education: 'If her father does not claim her before she is old enough to go to school, she must be sent to one of the very highest class. The liberal settlement Mr. Clifton made shall be spent to fit her for her future life. We shall never regret the step, I am sure.'

"That was all she knew; but it was sufficient to help her in deciding when, without a moment's warning, her husband was taken from her; her adopted child should be sent to school; and in order to increase her means the widow moved, not to Brooklyn but to Astoria, where she had remained for several years. Then, when Elsie came home from school, her health seemed to fail, and Mrs. Barton removed to Newport. While there she met, fell in love with, and married the brother of one of her schoolfellows. The strangest part of the business is that her husband turns out to be that fine young fellow whom the elder Geoffrey Elsmere disinherited two or three years ago for forming a *mesalliance*."

Royal Thornleigh stared rather vacantly.

"I think I misunderstood you," he said, in a puzzled tone. "Whom did Mr. Elsmere disinherit?"

"Why, don't you remember?—but perhaps you didn't notice the newspaper accounts, and you must have been abroad. Young Geoffrey Elsmere—as fine a young fellow as any on this side of the ocean or the other either, for the matter of that—met with a pretty little music-teacher at Newport, fell desperately in love and married her, and was in consequence disinherited. But what is the matter, Royal, my boy?"

"If what you say is true—and I feel it is so—I have committed a most fatal blunder," Royal Thornleigh said; "but let me hear the end of your story."

"There is little more to tell," Mr. Cleveland said, with a sigh. "After the marriage, young Elsmere went bravely to work to keep his wife from extreme poverty. For some time all went on quietly, and the young wife—my Edith's child—wrote cheerfully. Then her letters ceased, and Mrs. Barton's had been returned to her from the 'Dead Letter Office.' As soon as she could do so, the poor lady came to New York, and went to the factory where young Elsmere had obtained employment. The mystery was solved then; the firm had failed, and the young couple would not apply to her in their need. But where were they gone? She had come into the Park without any definite

aim; and so, after twenty long years, I met with this link to the past. Now, Royal, what is your blunder about?"

"My dear Cleveland," the young man returned, sadly, "I am reaping the folly now of my own stupidity and impetuosity. You know I went to Elsmere on Christmas Eve? Well, I went, intending to ask Maud Elsmere to be my wife. Just as I had told her of my regard for herself we were interrupted, and I did not get her reply.

"Perhaps I am scarcely justified in saying that her manner led me to suppose she would accept me. Yet such was my impression; and I intended to hear from her own lips, at my earliest opportunity, if I had been correct in my inference.

"But before the opportunity came, I learned that the proud, beautiful Miss Elsmere had made an appointment to meet some man secretly at midnight. The knowledge, acquired from a scrap of paper signed 'G. E.,' drove me nearly mad. Under the circumstances, I felt justified in seeing if the meeting took place. It did so; and I, having no idea that Maud was not Mr. Elsmere's only child, came away, after writing a few lines expressive of my abhorrence of her duplicity."

The young man paused, looking helplessly at his friend. The latter was not quite so depressed as the young lover. He got up and patted Royal Thornleigh on the shoulder.

"Do not be out of heart, old fellow!" he said cheerfully. "If the young lady loves you, she will be thankful to have the truth made clear. One thing is evident; she is cognizant of her brother's movements."

"To be sure she is!" And the young lover tried to shake off his own gloomy fears. "I feel confident, my dear Cleveland, that your daughter will soon be restored to you."

And he grasped his friend's hand in token of his sympathy.

"I shall lose no time," the other returned. "I must see Miss Elsmere to-morrow, if possible; she must know where my child is."

"There can be little doubt on the subject. How can you entertain any? 'G. E.' must mean 'Geoffrey Elsmere.' Had I not been so hasty, perhaps I might have arrived at that conclusion before," Thornleigh said, regretfully.

"Well, don't despair, my boy! When she knows how you made such a very natural blunder, she will forgive you."

"But she will think it an unnatural blunder, I fear. You don't know how proud she is. Yet even you must have noticed her haughty manner."

"Perhaps, as she seems to love her brother, I may see her unbend from her frigid calm," Mr. Cleveland returned.

His friend was silent. He was thinking of the time when Maud Elsmere's face had been bright and flushed at his presence. How he longed to see it again!

"I wish you success from the bottom of my heart, Cleveland. I should like to be able to see her when she hears the good news. However, I will wait to see you before I go to Grantley's. I shall be anxious to hear the news."

CHAPTER VI.

BACK TO HIS OWN.

"I HAVE contrived to get away from my aunt's whirl of pleasure, you see, Elsie," Maud Elsmere said, blithely, as she entered the shabby little sitting-room where her sister-in-law sat sewing busily, while with one foot she kept her baby's cradle in motion.

"You are very good, dear, to leave such attractions," Mrs. Elsmere said, as she rose and folded the delicate satin work she was embroidering, and for which she hoped to receive a couple of dollars after hours of patient work.

"Attractions! I am sick of them, if you mean the continual round of payety! An hour spent here is worth a dozen elsewhere!"

"Then I ought to be content," Elsie said with a smile. "How I wish Geoffrey would come. He will be so disappointed if he does not see you, and I feel sure he will come home with the same story of failure." And the young wife sighed sadly. "He is almost out of heart, Maud, I fear."

"I wish there was no need for this hateful poverty!" Miss Elsmere said, vehemently. "Wouldn't it be a relief if you could prove that Mrs. Barton's idea respecting your birth was not a false one?"

"It is of no use to think of it more, Maudie. I have gone over the story of my birth so often that I am almost weary of it."

"Nevertheless, to please me, dear, you will

not mind referring to it just this once," Maud said, as she knelt by her sister's side, and passed one arm around her waist. "Did you not tell me that, although you were always called 'Barton,' you were married in the name borne by your father?"

"Yes, dear. His name was Clifton—Arthur Clifton. But, Maudie, why do you ask?" And Mrs. Elsmere looked searchingly into the beautiful face that now wore its rare softened expression.

"I fancy, Elsie—I hope I may not be wrong, but I think I have found out something that may help you to discover the truth. If so, that nocturnal visit of Geoffrey's to Elsmere has been productive of some good after all."

Mrs. Elsmere did not speak. She clasped her hands on her lap, and looked mutely at her companion.

"I will not keep you in suspense, dear. A gentleman has been recognized by Mrs. Barton as the Mr. Arthur Clifton who left you in her care. He has searched for you for years, and at length fancied you must be dead. From what your adopted mother told him he learned that you had married my brother. He is a wealthy man, Elsie, moving in good society, and told his story to Mr. Thornleigh, who then knew that it was my brother who met me secretly; so your father came to me with the story, and asked to know of your whereabouts."

But Elsie did not hear the last few words, and her husband, coming in a moment later, was alarmed to see her lying in a fainting state, with her head on Maud's shoulder.

"Lift her to the couch, Geoffrey. There, that is better! Do not be frightened, dear brother; she will soon be all right. It was joy that overcame her, thank Heaven! Not sorrow this time, dear, dear Geoffrey. I believe all will be well yet."

Brother and sister were, in the mean time, trying to restore the young wife to consciousness. Very soon they succeeded, but not before Mr. Elsmere had heard the news of "Mr. Clifton's" existence. Mr. Cleveland had enjoined Miss Elsmere not to speak of him by his real name, so she simply said that his family was quite as old and wealthy as her own, and that Mr. Elsmere's pride would therefore be satisfied.

"I hope, now, that papa will cancel all the new arrangements, and have you home again, Geoffrey. But if he does not, the old life of poverty will be ended. Elsie is her father's only child, and the heiress to his great wealth." And Maud turned away for a moment to lift her baby nephew from his tiny bed.

"When will my father come?" Elsie asked, when she was sufficiently recovered to speak.

"As soon as you will see him. This evening, if he may."

"Oh, yes, Maudie; let him come! You do not know what this is to me, dear. Think how many years I have waited for his coming!"

"I know, Elsie, dear little sister. Rest assured that he will lose no time when he knows that I have prepared you for his visit."

Soon afterward Miss Elsmere left the mean, unfashionable part of the metropolis, and drove rapidly to the more aristocratic locality where Mrs. Brentwood's mansion stood. Before evening she had communicated with Mr. Cleveland, who was waiting impatiently for his daughter's summons.

"If you please, sir, a gentleman is asking to see Mr. and Mrs. Elsmere. His name is Clifton. May I show him up?"

The inquiry was made by an untidy servant-maid, whose manner was somewhat more respectful in addressing "the poor young people" who rented the poorest of her mistress's rooms, than it was wont to be in general to their predecessors in those humble apartments. She fancied she could tell the look of people who were from the upper ranks; and if Mr. and Mrs. Elsmere were poor, they must have seen better days. Besides, she was sure that the young lady who had twice called on them was a lady; and now a "real gentleman" was waiting to be received.

Having gained Mr. Elsmere's permission, the maid disappeared, and returned a moment later to throw the door open to admit the gentleman in question. Mrs. Elsmere was in the inner room; but Geoffrey went forward eagerly to welcome the new-comer.

"You are Geoffrey Elsmere?" and the gentleman looked round the room, as if in expectation of seeing Mr. Elsmere's wife. "I remember you well."

"Pardon me," Mr. Elsmere said, "there is some mistake. I was expecting to see a Mr. Clifton. I see now that I misunderstood the

servant's message. I have the honor of addressing the Hon. Mr. Cleveland, I believe?"

"You are quite right; there is no mistake," Mr. Cleveland returned, as he warmly grasped Geoffrey's hand, "excepting in the supposition that I am not Mr. Arthur Clifton. A glance at my card will show you that my name is Arthur Clifton Cleveland."

At this moment Elsie returned. Her lovely face was pale, and fear of some kind made her look ill.

"Geoffrey, did I hear you say it was all a mistake?" she asked fearfully, going to her husband's side.

But her father took her in his arms.

"There is no doubting that you are my Edith's child," he said, hoarsely. "Even the look of fear that was on my poor wife's face when I left her has been transmitted to you. I hope it is not permanent, my child."

It did not take long to convince him that he need have no fears on that head. Elsie Elsmere's radiant loveliness had no tinge of fear or sorrow as she welcomed her father. And his heart seemed filled to overflowing as again and again he shook his son-in-law's hand, and then turned again to look at Elsie and her boy.

"You have been proud of his name, Miss Elsmere told me," he said, smilingly, with a nod toward his grandson; "but you may be prouder yet, for he is heir to all my possessions, Elsie. Did you think of that?"

"No, dear father; and I do not wish to think of him as he may be some day, but as he is now, son of the best husband, and grandson of the dearest father in Christendom."

CHAPTER VII.

"DOWN THE SHADOWY LANE SHE GOES."

HERBERT HILTON's recovery—or, rather, his acquisition of strength—seemed somewhat tardy; but at the beginning of March he began to think seriously of returning to his military duties. He should be more likely to regain something of his old healthy tone when he had to go through the routine of the duties of his office, he told himself; and much as his mother and sister wished to keep him with them, they were wise enough to yield to his wishes, and consider him sensible in urging his doctor to pronounce him fully restored to health.

He had only three days to remain at home when an event happened that changed the whole course of his life—namely, the accidental drowning of John Hilton and his son; the latter perishing in a noble attempt to rescue his father, who had gone out boating on the pretty little bay that could be seen from the windows of the fine old mansion where the Hiltons had lived for two or three generations and, with a friend who was spending a few days at his house, rowed out of the shelter of the harbor and got upset.

Young Hilton, who had been watching the course of his father's small craft for some time, put out in the only available vessel at hand—a poor, rickety pleasure-boat, that had long been abandoned as unseaworthy. He contrived to row across the smooth water of the harbor, but when the open sea was reached, his frail boat soon filled with water; and some lads, who had by this time become aware of what was going on, soon looked in vain for the brave young fellow who, as they supposed, had expected, if his own boat failed, to be able to reach the one in which his father had gone out.

Three bodies were washed ashore the same evening, among the loud wailings of the villagers, who had for hours been using every effort to rescue the unfortunate men.

In young Hilton the poor had lost a friend; and though his father was no favorite, his death had come so suddenly that his virtues were for once more thought of than his faults.

The only other immediate relatives of John Hilton were his nephew and niece, Florence and Herbert Hilton, and in default of any other disposition of the property it all went to them.

Everybody had seen Herbert Hilton when, a year before, young Hilton had induced his father to invite him over for a few weeks; and although Jordan, the family lawyer, had no knowledge as to Herbert's address, there was no difficulty in communicating with the young gentleman at official quarters.

Herbert Hilton's feelings were a mixture of sorrowful regret for the loss of life that had brought him a fortune and thankfulness that he had not received it previous to his rejection by Lucy Millington.

He was too sincere in his regard for his cousin

to have any feelings of gratification, and for a time he felt that the position he was so suddenly called to occupy was an irksome one. That was owing, in a great measure, to the poor state of his health.

Under the circumstances, it was incumbent on him to proceed to the house of mourning, where he remained until the remains of the unfortunate men were interred. Much would have to be done before the new owners could settle down in their new home.

Arrangements had to be made for resigning his commission, so, for a few weeks, Herbert considered it advisable to remain quietly at his mother's unpretending dwelling. The widow was so attached to her old home that she had no wish to leave it, excepting on her son's and daughter's account.

"I should infinitely prefer to remain here if, after a time, you take to yourself a wife, my dear," she said, a few days after the news had come of the sad catastrophe.

Herbert was silent for awhile, and when he spoke again it was on another subject. Soon afterward he had an opportunity of speaking privately to Florence.

"You heard what my mother said about my marriage, Florrie? I want your advice, dear. How fortunate I was in getting through that wretched business at Elsmere before I heard this news!"

"I expect that the money-loving young lady will not feel quite so thankful," Florence said, with a laugh. "I cannot think how she could have been so insane," the girl went on with a loving look at her brother. "It seems to me that any girl might deem herself fortunate in winning your love, Herbert."

And certainly there was some excuse for Miss Hilton's admiration of her brother, whose affection for her, and tenderness for his invalid mother, proved that his character well accorded with his handsome appearance.

"You are almost as bad as my mother, I declare!" he rejoined, with a smile. "It is quite time for you to see more of your fellow-mortals, Florrie. It is only by comparison with others that we find our own level. But, dear sister, I want to tell you of what is in my heart. I will not act on impulse this time, but I have seen one who, if I could only win her, has all the qualities that I should wish for in my wife; but, Florrie, this time I have had no encouragement."

"Are you thinking of Eva Walsingham?" Florence asked, eagerly. "Oh, Herbert! if it could be! I have been hoping so much that you might learn to love her."

"But, Florence, that is not the question now. I am getting impatient to know if she could love me. I fancied once—But no! her manner was less cordial at the end of my stay at The Willows than it was on the first evening of our acquaintance."

"Might not the change arise from the knowledge she must have possessed of your infatuation for Miss Millington?" Florence suggested.

"Which presupposes, Florrie, that she would be influenced from some preference for myself, does it not? But I have no such hope."

His sister hesitated between her desire to encourage her brother and her wish to act honorably by Eva.

"Would it not be as well to settle the suspense at once by going to Eva with a straightforward question?" she said. "I would not counsel you thus, Herbert, but I know that Eva is worthy of your love, and that mamma would like to feel that you are comfortably and happily settled."

"I have suffered so for my temerity once that I am naturally diffident now," Herbert said, with a nervous laugh. "One obstacle has been removed—my lack of wealth," he went on gravely, "so perhaps I ought to feel encouraged. But, Florence, she is so incomparably my superior in every respect that—"

"That you will be doing us all a kindness by bringing such a treasure into our home," his sister interrupted. "Do be sensible, Herbert, and remember that it is due to Eva that she should have an opportunity of accepting your love."

"Then I will go, Florrie. My mother need not know anything of this until I return. She will naturally suppose I have plenty of business on hand just now, and I should not like her to know that I am suffering any disappointment if I fail."

"Very well, Herbert; but remember there is to be no talk of failure. You know what an old wisacre I am; and I prophesy your triumphant return."

"I am going into the lanes to find some wild-flowers and violets; I am sure that papa will be glad to see evidences of his return to country life after three weeks' stay in town. What do you say, mamma?"

"I think that you are right, as usual, my dear. How thankful I shall be to see your papa at home again! It seems to me that we are quite cut off from the world during his absence. Only look at that great pile of newspapers, all unopened!"

"Well, mamma, it will be so much nicer to listen to papa's gossip if we are in ignorance; and he will be the more gratified in relating what he considers worthy of note! I shall not be very long, mamma." And Eva Walsingham took a fancy basket from a stand in the hall, and went quickly out in quest of the pretty spring blossoms.

She was not long in filling her basket with bunches of dark purple violets, clusters of pale anemone, and sprays of the beautiful green leaves, together with delicate "lady ferns," for wild-flowers and pretty grasses and ferns grew in rich profusion along the banks that skirted the well-sheltered lanes.

So Eva's task was soon completed, and she sat down for a moment to see that her treasures were securely placed, when a gentleman came in sight round a bend in the lane only a few yards distant. For a moment she did not recognize him, for he was attired in black; but suddenly the bright color that dyed her face and neck proved that she knew and felt interested in him.

She rose hurriedly, and extended her hand. "I am glad to see you able to walk so well," she said, with a determination to be calm. "But, I fear, Mr. Hilton, you are not strong yet. Have you lost—is all well at home?" with a glance at his dress.

"Yes, thank you," and Herbert's face began to resume its ordinary hue, for something in Eva's manner led him to hope that she was not so indifferent as he had feared. "I have lost some relatives—father and son—by accidental drowning."

"I am very sorry," Eva said, simply. "Were you on very intimate terms?"

"Yes, with the son—my cousin—especially; and his death has cast a cloud over my poor mother. But let us forget that now. Do you know that I have come here on purpose to see you?"

"And papa has not returned from the city yet," Eva said, misunderstanding the young man's use of the pronoun; "but we expect him this evening."

"Then he will be in time to answer the question I hope to refer to him—that is, with your permission, Eva."

It was the first time he had ever so addressed her.

She gave one quick, hurried, questioning glance into the face she had loved so hopelessly, and the reaction of feeling was so intense that tears shone for a moment in her beautiful eyes.

"May I hope, Eva dear? Can you forgive the stupidity which was enchanted by the glitter of a false gem, instead of by the purity of the real one? Tell me, dearest, that the coldness you have shown me has not arisen from dislike. Can you promise to love me just a little, dear? The love I bear you is so deep and earnest, that I think it must gain a response from you in time."

The fair face was bent over the beautiful flowers, and Eva listened to her lover's words without interruption; then she lifted her eyes, in which unshed tears glistened, and inquired:

"Are you quite sure that you are not mistaken? Can a man love twice? And was not your first, best love given to Miss Millington before?"

Herbert's face became pale and anxious.

"I thought so then, because I believed that the girl possessed the qualities which I most admire in women, and without which it would be impossible for me to give my love. When I found that the pretty exterior covered a cold, calculating heart, all charm was gone. The disappointment was keen, but I needed the lesson to teach me how to discern between true and false metal."

"But," Eva said, shyly, "may you not be again mistaken? You cannot read what is in my heart."

"If I could only read that there is hope for me," Herbert said, "I should be content. Have you just a little love for me, my darling?"

And emboldened by her blushes, he drew her head upon his shoulder.

"Not a little," she said gently. "The whole

love of my heart is yours, Herbert. I thought the anguish of those sad weeks would have killed me; but worst of all was the shameful reflection that I had given you my love unasked."

"Thank Heaven you did so, darling! But for that it would not be mine now. Remember, Eva, my love, that the true love which knits our hearts together is heaven-born. You could not control the feelings of your heart, dear, although you so skillfully managed to make me feel that I was nothing to you. I longed to speak of my love in those days of returning health, but your manner repelled me."

"I am thankful that it did so, dear Herbert. I should hate myself had I been unwomanly enough to betray what I felt, until you had yourself spoken."

The time passed quickly by, and still the lovers lingered.

"We really must be sensible, Herbert!" Eva said, laughingly, when an hour had passed in happy forgetfulness of all save themselves. "Mamma will be imagining all sorts of horrors in connection with me; and besides, I want to arrange papa's favorite flowers before his return."

So Herbert was obliged to acquiesce, and, ten minutes later, the lovers entered the grounds that belonged to The Willows.

Mrs. Walsingham welcomed Herbert politely; but he could not help feeling that there was a lack of cordiality in her manner, as she glanced uneasily from her daughter's beautiful shy face to Herbert's calmly serene one. She mentally hoped that "that penniless, handsome young officer" would not come too often in contact with her lovely and wealthy daughter. But the worthy lady's prejudice vanished an hour later, with her husband's first words.

"Halloo, Herbert! Or, Mr. Hilton, I suppose I should say! How delighted I am to have this opportunity of congratulating you! A sad business, that boating disaster. But such is the way of the world. 'The king is dead; God save the king!' you know."

Eva looked as astounded as her mother; but it was the latter who spoke.

"I declare, Mr. Hilton, you are too bad. Why did you not say that the loss of your relations had altered your position?"

"I feel their loss—my cousin's especially—too greatly to allow me to rejoice as I otherwise should at my good fortune," Herbert said, gravely. "But, madam, and you, my dear sir, I should like to say now what I wish to tell you. I have been kept hitherto from asking you to give me your daughter's hand, because I feared to ask her to give herself to a poor man; but now that difficulty is removed—and sir, we love each other dearly—will you give her to me?"

"Eh?—what? My little Eva? Bless my soul!" the old gentleman said, in amazement, while his daughter put her arms round his neck. "So you are agreed!" he went on with a laugh, by which to cover the misty look of his eyes and suspicious quivering of his lips. "Well, then, it's useless to say nay, I suppose! Take her, Hilton. I have a good opinion of you, or I would not hand her over to you, in spite of her wish to run away from her old father."

All hearts were full; but it was a happy family circle that slept under the roof of The Willows that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

SACRIFICED THROUGH PRIDE.

It was not often that Mr. Elsmere went to the theater, but he had always expressed a wish to see Booth as *Hamlet*, to be able to compare that great actor's merits with those of Forrest in the same character. Thus it came to pass for once during his visit to New York he found himself again sitting "before the curtain," with a curious sense of having gone back to the old days, when with his beautiful bride he had frequented similar places, and had been a great lover of the drama.

But the lovely girl by his side was very unlike his companion of days gone by. He closed his eyes for a moment, and pictured that long-lost face. How he remembered it as it bent in loving tenderness over her baby-boy! But that was long, long ago—she was gone. And her darling boy—where was he?

Mr. Elsmere opened his eyes. There was quite a little stir in the box opposite, caused by the entrance of some distinguished party. Ah! the gentleman was the Honorable Arthur Cleveland; but who could that lovely girl be on whom all eyes were fixed? Mr. Cleveland was paying her great attention; but he could

not be thinking of "making love to her, surely." Certainly not; at any rate, his chance of success would be small, for another and younger gentleman was bending over her, saying something in a low voice, and her glorious eyes were raised to his with an expression in them that eyes only take when looking at the face dearest to them.

Suddenly the younger gentleman lifted his head and in that moment Mr. Elsmere recognized his wife's darling boy. The play was commencing, but Mr. Elsmere could not think of that. He was dazed and stupefied.

"Papa, dear, this heat is overpowering," Maud's voice said softly. "Will you take me out?"

"Did you speak, my dear? Take you out? Yes, dear. I thought it was cold." And Maud saw with concern how white he had become. "Let us go home, child; I—I am cold and faint."

The carriage would not be in attendance for some time; but several gentlemen were anxious to be of service, so a hack was called, and Mr. Elsmere was soon left in company with his daughter, to go quietly home to Mrs. Brentwood's mansion.

"What does it mean, Maude?" her father asked, as the gentlemen returned to their seats in the theater.

"It means, dear papa, that Geoffrey's wife was quite correct in fancying herself well-born. She has lately been restored to her father, the Hon. Mr. Cleveland, whose heiress she is, and who is proud of his lovely daughter and her noble-hearted husband. The baby, too, is a perfect treasure to its grandfather."

Mr. Elsmere started slightly when the child was mentioned.

"Is it a boy?" he asked, with eyes fixed on the carriage window.

"Yes, papa. He is called Geoffrey, and is very like that picture of mamma. You know, papa?"

There was no answer.

Maud nestled closer to his side. She feared to speak; yet, perhaps, she would never have so good an opportunity. Her voice was tremulous when she commenced, "Papa, dear, won't you forgive him now—poor Geoffrey, of whom mamma was so fond? You see, papa, he did not marry beneath him, after all; and his instincts were not at fault in recognizing true gold, for Elsie is a thorough lady in all respects. You could judge for yourself, papa, this evening."

She waited patiently for a reply. It was some minutes before it came.

"The fault is none the less grievous because circumstances have made the penalty less severe. I admit that it is more gratifying to know that Geoffrey Elsmere's wife is a lady than a poor ignorant music-teacher; but that my—that he married without knowing whom he married, and without any regard for my feelings on the subject, is sufficient to prove him unworthy of my consideration."

"But, papa—" Miss Elsmere began.

"That will do, Maud. Here we are at home. I do not choose to discuss the matter further." And Mr. Elsmere set his teeth firmly together under cover of his heavy mustache.

So the hope of reconciliation which had been so strengthened by her father's emotion died out of Miss Elsmere's heart, and she went to her room sadly dispirited, longing earnestly that she might soon return to the seclusion of Elsmere, instead of daily mixing with the bright, gay world, where everything was so little in unison with her weary, disappointed heart.

Mr. Cleveland gave a grand ball in honor of his daughter's installment as mistress of his establishment.

Geoffrey Elsmere was not quite comfortable in accepting the home that had so suddenly opened to receive him; but his father-in-law would not be content to let his daughter go.

"I honor you for this, as for every other motive that has actuated you in your relationship with Elsie," the other said; "but you must bear with me, Geoffrey, if I am anxious to retain my child now I have found her. Think how I have lived all alone all these years!"

And Mr. Elsmere could not find the courage necessary to refuse so earnest a request.

"You must try to find me some appointment," he stipulated; "I cannot live a life of idle dependence."

And Mr. Cleveland was well content to use his influence to find a Government post for his son-in-law.

So Elsie became the acknowledged mistress of

her father's house, and a ball was to be given for the beautiful young heiress to issue invitations to those members of society who had already received her with open arms.

Mr. Elsmere made no objection when Maud mentioned to him that Mrs. Brentwood was desirous that she should accompany her to Mr. Cleveland's.

And Maud was anxious to be near her sister-in-law: for report had said that the two girls had always been on good terms, and Maud hoped that her presence would tend to turn the popular notion concerning her father's implacability.

Her enjoyment of Geoffrey's society was the chief attraction of the evening, and many of the gentlemen who had seen Miss Elsmere's cold demeanor at several preceding balls were astonished at her sweetness on that evening, when, for the first time, she was meeting her brother openly.

Had not Royal Thornleigh appeared on the scene, she might have, for a time, forgotten her own troubles. He was late in arriving, and Maud was not aware of his presence for some time. Then the smiles left her face again, and she forgot to be gracious.

The time was very weary after that, until Geoffrey contrived to take her away quietly into a cosy little room.

"Elsie says you looked tired, dear, and so I am to smuggle you off to a quiet nook."

And Maud was glad of the soft light in the deserted little room. Her brother left her to fetch her a glass of wine, and she sunk wearily into a chair.

"You are very thoughtful, dear Geoffrey," she said, without looking up, when a moment later, she heard steps crossing to her side. "I have over-tired myself lately, and this disappointment about papa—"

"Maud, dearest, it is not Geoffrey. Will you not welcome me instead of him, and let my foolish mistake be forgotten?"

"You are making a mistake now, Mr. Thornleigh," she said, coldly, as she rose to her feet. "I am Miss Elsmere, and am not aware of any circumstance that can by any means be converted into an excuse for the manner in which you have presumed to address me. You will therefore have the goodness—"

"And for one foolish blunder—a blunder that I might have had the sense to avoid—are we to be made miserable?" he asked, in tones of deepest agony.

"Really, my dear sir,"—and she laughed coolly—"I imagine you have been preparing some tragic rehearsal! By what ingenious course of reasoning have you contrived to assure yourself that I am to be made miserable? My presence here to-night is a proof that I am nearer happiness than I have been for years; so, pray, be under no apprehension on my account."

"You persist in misunderstanding me," Royal Thornleigh said, sadly. "You know that I refer to the note that I wrote to you concerning your meeting with your brother."

"In which I believe you expressed your disapproval of my conduct? But still you are blundering. I simply regarded your censure as an unwarrantable piece of presumption. And, now, all that need be said has been said, I believe, and I should feel obliged if you would kindly leave me before my brother returns."

"But, Maud, I must say it, if I die!" he exclaimed, passionately.

"You must have known when you read that note that I did not know your brother had been the one to come—"

"Silence, Mr. Thornleigh! Have you the audacity to tell me to my face that I met a—a—Good heavens! And you ask me to pardon an insult so outrageous!"

"How was I to dream of the existence of your brother? Do be reasonable, Miss Elsmere, and listen to what I wish to say."

"Pardon me, there is no need for more—Ah, Geoffrey; how long you have been!"

"That comes of being the hero of a romantic love-story!" he said, with a laugh. "Mr. Cleveland is asking for you, Thornleigh," he added, without appearing to notice that young man's haggard face.

Maud took the wine from Geoffrey's hand, and drank it eagerly.

"Couldn't you contrive to send me home without making a commotion? I am over-tired, Geoffrey, and shall be thankful to get away."

"All right, dear; but how about Aunt Brentwood?"

"Do not let her know at present that I have gone, and tell her to say as little as she can about it. I wanted to show up here to-night for

all our sakes, and now I have done all that is needful."

"Maudie, dear sister, forgive me! Isn't there more behind? Don't let a myth spoil your life, dear sister," and he lifted her face and kissed her tenderly.

"My life will not be spoiled if papa will only welcome Baby Geoffrey to Elsmere," she answered lightly. "Now see about the carriage, there's a dear fellow."

Ten minutes later she was whirling homeward; and amid the rumble of wheels came her brother's entreaty, now seeming like a warning, "Don't let a myth spoil your life."

CHAPTER IX.

A MIND DISEASED.

THE Elsmere church bells were ringing gayly, and many groups of people in holiday attire, were talking of the wedding that had just taken place; for, on this warm September day, Eva Walsingham had become Mrs. Hilton. The wedding had been talked of for weeks, and the country people had been quite excited at the preparations.

Now that the ceremony is over, they form in little knots to discuss the event.

"No one, not even the bride herself, looked lovelier than our young lady," one of the Elsmere neighbors remarked; "but it's my opinion she's too lovely to remain here much longer. I wish somebody would give a hint. It seems to me folks never see what is going on under their very eyes, and Mr. Elsmere doesn't seem to notice that anything is wrong."

It was quite true. Maud Elsmere was greatly changed, and yet her father seemed perfectly unconscious of the fact. She and Florence Hilton had formed one of the three couples at Eva's wedding, and her father had noticed with pride her delicate loveliness, shown to advantage by the creamy satin dress she wore. It was certainly a tired-looking face that looked smilingly into his when the last slipper had been hurried after the carriage that carried the bridal pair away.

"Do you feel equal to the evening party, Maud, my child? You are looking very tired," he said, as she leaned on his arm.

"If Mrs. Walsingham would excuse me, I should like to go home," she replied, wistfully. "But I fear she will feel hurt."

To Mr. Elsmere's surprise, when the proposal was made a few minutes later, the lady remarked:

"Poor dear! I was afraid it would be too much for her. Certainly we will excuse her, although we will miss her lovely face."

"And they are getting more scarce now," he replied with a smile, remembering how the young bride had been present at every ball in the neighborhood since his return to it.

"But, my dear madam, why do you speak so seriously about Maud? She does not strike you as looking ill, does she?"

"I have fancied that she has looked delicate since your stay in town. I suppose she was over-fatigued during the season. But I expected that a few weeks at home would set her up again. Does she ever complain?"

"No; but now I think seriously of the matter, she has not been so ready for active amusements lately, and she really does look tired out to-day," Mr. Elsmere said, an expression of anxiety deepening on his face.

"Perhaps the heat has been too much," Mrs. Walsingham remarked; for although that lady had wondered at his obtuseness concerning Miss Elsmere's evident weakness, she was inclined to gloss the matter over now that his perceptions were awakened.

"But the heat did not affect her so last year; and she used to be equal to a little pleasant excitement," Mr. Elsmere exclaimed. "I am convinced that there is something wrong, and I will have advice at once."

Very tenderly the anxious father hovered around his darling for the rest of the day. She, laughing, tried to dissuade him from his purpose of sending for a doctor.

"He will tell you I am giving way to idleness," she said, nervously, for in reality she dreaded the ordeal of seeing him. "I am not in pain, dear papa; and very probably Doctor Wilson will think we are making a fuss about nothing."

"I hope he may, my dear. Anyway, I am quite determined that he shall see you to-morrow."

By the morrow Maud had worked herself into a fever of excitement. The efforts she made to appear cheerful and natural had the opposite effect; and when Doctor Wilson ar-

rived, her face was flushed and her hands burning.

"You are too warm in this close room, are you not?" the keen-eyed little man asked, knowing that she was not really so.

"On the contrary, I am feeling quite chilled. I was wondering if the weather had grown colder since yesterday," Maud returned, as she moved her hand restlessly on the back of her favorite dog.

The doctor was in no hurry to leave the Hall. Mr. Elsmere and he were on good terms, and he pretended to be remaining for a friendly chat, when, in reality, he wanted to notice his patient. He was a shrewd man; and having learned from her father that Maud's depression had commenced about the time of her stay in New York, he fancied that perhaps the sudden return of Geoffrey Elsmere into society had something to do with her low spirits.

Might she not fear that her father would be influenced to recall his son, who had become so great a favorite with society, and so make an alteration in her position at Elsmere? That was the only solution he could find to the difficulty, unless there was some unfortunate love-affair; and how could the beautiful heiress of Elsmere be unfortunate in that respect?

Mr. Elsmere walked out a little way with the doctor when the interview with Miss Elsmere was over.

"There is something on her mind, Mr. Elsmere, and unless some means can be found to relieve her distress, I cannot do much for her. She has a good constitution, but it has suffered great havoc from some mental strain. I do not wish to pry into her private business, but I am under the impression that trouble of some kind is at the root of the mischief. Can you see any way out of the difficulty, Mr. Elsmere?" And Doctor Wilson looked earnestly at his companion's anxious face.

"I fear not," was the answer. "I do not know of any trouble that could so affect her." But even as he spoke the thought of her grief at the persistent refusal to be reconciled to his son came into the father's mind.

"Then I very much fear she will have a hard time of it. I don't like the feverishness. I will send some mixture at once; and I had better run in again this evening."

"Do so; and, Wilson—she is my only daughter—if you see any danger, let me know at once."

"You may rely on me; and if, as I fear, she is worse to-morrow, I should feel relieved if you would call in other aid," the doctor remarked, anticipating Mr. Elsmere's wish on the subject. "Not," he added, "that any one can do more for her than I, who know her constitution so well, but we shall feel that—in fact, it will be greater satisfaction to us all."

Maud was very restless during the day. Her father spoke of their visit to Mrs. Brentwood, with the express purpose of eliciting some remark that would throw light on the doctor's suggestion. But he was unsuccessful, and was at length driven to ask, "Is anything troubling you, my child? If there is any care or sorrow, of which I am ignorant, will not my darling let me do something to remove it?"

The fever burned brighter in her cheeks, and her laugh sounded unnatural as she replied:

"Trouble! What trouble could I have, papa? Do not imagine that I am unhappy."

And her father saw that his attempts to win her confidence were doing her harm; but, in his own mind, there was a lurking suspicion the doctor was right.

That evening the beautiful girl grew worse, and when the morrow dawned over the earth, and the sun lit the quivering dewdrops with wondrous tints, no one at the Hall gave thought to the beautiful outer world, for all hearts were anxious for the young mistress, into whose eyes came no brightness with the glad, warm sunshine.

Her father, although outwardly calm, suffered most acutely. Could it be possible that, after all, Heaven would not suffer his daughter to inherit what should have been given to his son? The doubt would come so often; and when the anxious father sat beside his suffering child, his heart was very heavy. But he could not forgive Geoffrey even then. Had not Geoffrey deserved his just anger? Was he not the cherished object of his father's pride and his mother's love?

The proud heart faltered for a moment then; but it was not until a few days later, when a sense of his own unworthiness and insignificance came to him, that the haughty head was bowed by the side of that fearfully deathlike face. That same evening Geoffrey Elsmere re-

ceived a telegram from his father. It said simply:

"Come home, my son; Maud is very ill."

But the words "my son" spoke volumes to the heart that had so longed for his father's forgiveness; and it was with mingled feelings of trouble and thankfulness that Geoffrey sought his wife.

"I have had rather bad news of Maudie, my darling," he said. "She is ill, and I am going to see her."

"To Elsmere, Geoffrey?" Lady Elsie exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, dear. See here." And her husband produced the telegram.

"Poor Maudie! I believe she has been troubling about that wretched mistake of Mr. Thornleigh's. Do you think he cares for her, Geoffrey?"

"I am sure of it. Let him know how she is, my love."

"I will, dear," Elsie said, as she looked again at the telegram. "Why, Geoffrey, surely your father never sent that message! Do you see how he addresses you?"

"Yes, my darling; and but for the thought of poor Maud, I should feel nothing but thankfulness."

"What can have brought about such a change?" Elsie murmured. "Can it be that trouble about Maud has softened his heart?"

"Perhaps so, dear. I have ordered Grayson to pack a few things together, for I want to set out at once. I shall be able to reach Elsmere this evening if I can catch the express. Where is the child, Elsie?"

Five minutes later Geoffrey Elsmere had taken a hurried leave of his wife and little son, and for the second time since his marriage he set out on his journey to the home of his childhood. His anxiety for Maud did not prevent him from contrasting this with his former journey. Then he had left his delicate young wife and son alone but for the occasional visits of the little servant-maid; now they were surrounded by attendants who would obey their slightest wish. Then he stole into his father's grounds in the dead of night; now he was going openly at that father's earnest wish.

The train seemed to go very slowly, and yet it was not behind time when it drew up in front of the old familiar station. A servant in the Elsmere livery stood on the platform. Mr. Elsmere recognized him at once as one of those who had been in his family's service in his mother's lifetime.

The man touched his hat respectfully, while tears glistened in his eyes.

"I'm right glad to see you again, Master Geoffrey, though it is a sad house you're coming to," he said, brokenly. "Our young lady will be better for knowing you are at home, sir; that is, when she comes to her senses again."

"Then she is delirious? What ails her? I only had a telegram," Mr. Elsmere said, quickly.

"It is a sort of fever, sir. The doctor says it isn't infectious, though; but it has weakened her terribly, poor young lady, and she had been delicate before. She has never seemed very well since the New Year came in—leastways, so I've fancied, and I've not been alone in my opinion; but her visit to New York made the most noticeable alteration in her, only Mr. Elsmere didn't seem to see it."

"What do the doctors say?"

"They don't know what has brought on the illness, I think, sir; and they cannot tell how it will end till she gets the turn."

By this time Geoffrey Elsmere had entered the carriage which his father had sent in expectation of his son's arrival.

"His affection for Maud will bring him, even though he may have ceased to feel anything for me," his father thought.

Doctor Wilson was somewhat troubled when he learned that Mr. Geoffrey Elsmere had been sent for.

"Do you think the sight of her brother will be beneficial?" he asked, when Mr. Elsmere spoke of his son's probable visit.

"I do," Mr. Elsmere returned. "She always regarded him with deep affection, and the one point on which we have ever disagreed has been that of banishing him. Only a few weeks ago she urged me to be reconciled to him. I wish her to see, if she is mercifully restored to consciousness, that I have yielded at last."

"I thank you for your confidence, sir," the doctor said, gravely; "and I believe you have acted wisely. Anything that will tend to soothe our patient will be of advantage."

Mr. Elsmere did not leave his daughter's

room until he heard wheels on the drive outside. Then he went out, and stood bareheaded on the broad steps. In a moment his son was grasping his hand.

"I am here, dear father," he said. "You will now forget my youthful willfulness, and let me help to share your trouble," he said, softly.

"And my boy must forget his father's hardness," was the reply. "I have been a long time learning the lesson, Geoffrey. Perhaps this sorrow was needed to show me the utter uselessness of setting up ourselves against all the dictates of mercy. You must be prepared to see a great change in our poor child; her face is altered so from its cold, proud beauty, and her hair has been cut off."

But Geoffrey Elsmere was not prepared for the awful change that had come over the lovely face—the face which had no coldness for him, but had been the link between him and his old life. For some moments he could not speak. Then it was to the doctor.

"Is it possible she can live?" he asked; and there was no mistaking the anguish that was expressed in his look.

"It is not impossible. She is sleeping now; I expect she will be conscious when she wakes."

And before long the beautiful eyes were opened, and the light of reason shone forth again.

"Is that you, Geoffrey? Then it is not a dream! I thought that papa and you were sitting by my bed. But where is papa?"

"I am here, my darling."

And the father's eyes were dim as he took her wasted hand.

"Has Elsie come, and Baby Geoffrey?" she asked.

"Not yet, dear; but she will be here soon," Geoffrey said, as he smiled across at his father.

"And now, Maudie, love, you must rest, or we shall all get into trouble for letting you talk."

"The greatest danger is over now," the doctor said, an hour later; "but you must insist on absolute quiet, sir, or I will not be responsible. Doctor Hamlin will be here again to-morrow," he added, as he took his leave.

Doctor Hamlin was the second member of the faculty who had been called in. He was a man of high standing and repute; and he had assured Mr. Elsmere that Doctor Wilson had already acted just as he should have advised.

As Maud had asked for Elsie and the child, Mr. Elsmere desired his son to send for them at once.

"I do not care to spare you now," he said. "But how will Elsie travel?"

"Mr. Cleveland will bring her, or depute the task to some one; Thornleigh, perhaps," Geoffrey said.

And he scanned his father's face to see if he had any knowledge of Maud's trouble with regard to him; but there was no indication of any such knowledge.

During the two days that elapsed before his wife's arrival, Geoffrey devised all sorts of plans for bringing peace to his unhappy sister. His father had told him of the doctor's opinion that nothing but mental distress had brought the poor girl to such a state; and from what Geoffrey already knew, he felt pretty sure that the unlucky mistake of Thornleigh's, as he called it, was the cause of it all. But he fancied that Elsie would have more wit than he to plan some means of bringing about a desirable state of affairs, and he waited rather impatiently for her coming.

CHAPTER X.

AT ODDS.

"My husband has gone to Elsmere at last, Mr. Thornleigh. We have long hoped for a reconciliation; but unfortunately the telegram that summoned him brought bad news."

"I hope no one is ill, Mrs. Elsmere?"

And the sudden paling of his lips betrayed much to the eyes that were trying to read his thoughts.

"Yes, unfortunately; Geoffrey's sister is ill. I am longing to go to her, but I do not know yet how my husband was received."

"What is the matter? Has she been ill long?"

"We have not heard any particulars; but I fancied she was not looking well when she was in town."

"Mrs. Elsmere," Mr. Thornleigh said, desperately, "I will tell you exactly why I am interested in Miss Elsmere. I once asked her to be my wife, and I believe she was about to give me a favorable answer when we were disturbed. Before I had an opportunity to repeat my question I unluckily sent her a note in which I inferred that she had met a lover by appoint-

ment. You know that I was unaware of the existence of her brother. I believe now that she did not at first understand all that was implied by what I said. But while she was in town—at your ball, by the way—I tried to win her forgiveness; but she repelled me with the utmost scorn. I do not think I am a vain man, and yet I tell you it is my firm conviction that but for that unfortunate error, Maud Elsmere would now be my wife."

"You have my deepest sympathy," Elsie said, gently. "My husband and I had a dim suspicion that there had been something wrong. Maud mentioned that you had been able to advise papa to apply to her for Geoffrey's address; and she was very indignant when my husband suggested that you had not known of his relationship to her. I assure you, dear Mr. Thornleigh, that Geoffrey and I will do all in our power to help you. You see, it seems as though we—that is, Geoffrey and I—have been the means of bringing sorrow to Maud, whereas we would do anything to show our love and gratitude to her; for, Mr. Thornleigh, in spite of her coldness to others, she has the very warmest of hearts where her loved ones are concerned."

"I know it," was the reply; "but I fear there will never be any warmth for me again. Never, in her coldest moments to others, have I seen anything to equal her manner to me at our last interview," he added, dejectedly.

"May not the exaggeration of coldness arise from the desire to repress other feelings?" Elsie suggested. "I am betraying no confidence in saying this, for I assure you that Maudie has never given us any reason to suppose you were anything to her; and my suggestion was based on your own remark, that you felt sure that she was inclined to accept you."

"I understand, Mrs. Elsmere, and I am greatly indebted to you for your kind interest. You will probably hear soon from Elsmere?"

"Yes; and I hope Geoffrey will send for me," was the answer. "I will let you know as soon as I hear."

"You are very kind; but—I think—I wonder if I might venture to go there—not to the Hall, but to the village hotel. I think that would be better than this uncertainty."

"Perhaps you are right. May I speak on the subject to papa?" Elsie asked.

"Yes. He knows how I am placed, and will probably be glad to have a chance of getting rid of my unsociable self for a time," he replied, with a poor attempt at a smile.

The time seemed interminable until the news came from Elsmere. Then no time was lost in preparing for the journey.

Elsie only took one servant with her—the baby's nurse—a respectable, motherly-looking woman; and her father decided that, as Mr. Thornleigh was bent on going, he would remain in the city until further news should be forthcoming.

It was a close, sultry day when Elsie saw, for the first time, the home where her husband's earliest recollections and affections were centered, and the excitement had made her unusually nervous; so that, when she entered the beautiful grounds, she felt she was looking very weary. Her husband had driven to the station to meet her, and he was somewhat surprised at her pale face.

"I am thinking, dear husband, what you must have suffered in those weary days of toil, after spending your childhood here," she said, as tears filled her eyes. "I cannot think how you could have been so patient."

"I chose deliberately, my darling! I knew that, in all probability, I should irrevocably offend my father. The mistake I made was in supposing myself able to secure some lucrative employment. But do not think now of that sorrowful time. Now that there seems more hope of poor Maud's recovery, I cannot think of the past. The worst part of the business is about poor Thornleigh. How ill he looks, Elsie! And he will be wretched down at that bustling little hotel. I must speak to my father on the subject."

"Do you think, dear Geoffrey, that your father could help us in any way to put an end to the estrangement between Maud and Mr. Thornleigh? He told me how it happened, Geoffrey, and I feel sure that it is her own willfulness that has reduced her to the state she is in. The worst of it is, too, that in endeavoring to help us she brought all this trouble on herself."

"I know, dear. At any rate, it will be necessary to explain something to my father, in case he may inadvertently mention Thornleigh's presence in the village."

"Yes. Look, Geoffrey, there is your father! How he has altered since the night when you pointed him out to me!"

"He has had a hard time, darling; but I think that the trouble has softened him. He is as tender as he was in the olden days, when my poor mother stood by his side."

Elsie was very pale when she sprang from the carriage. Mr. Elsmere was struck by the contrast between her appearance when he first saw her and now. He bent down and kissed her softly on the forehead.

"My little daughter will forgive the tardy welcome that has been given to her," he said, gravely. And Elsie thought how truly noble he looked in uttering words which until lately he would have deemed weak. "I am longing to see my little grandson," he added, kindly bent on making the young mother feel at home. "Maudie tells me he is like my poor wife."

"So Geoffrey thinks; but the nurse and he will be here in a few minutes. May I go to Maudie now?"

"Yes, my dear; she is longing to see you again."

So Elsie went, leaving her husband to speak of the subject they had been discussing.

Mr. Elsmere was troubled greatly by his son's communication.

"I had hoped that the only source of trouble had been removed with your coming," he said, sadly. "And yet, now you have brought the subject to my mind, I remember that on the night of Thornleigh's coming here, Maud was brighter and happier than I have since seen her. Something must have caused her to act so differently toward him when we were in town; but to tell the truth, Geoffrey, I was too harassed about you then to notice what was going on around me."

For a few days after Elsie's arrival, Maud seemed to improve greatly. The pleasure of seeing her father speaking kindly to Geoffrey's wife, and noticing the child with daily increasing interest, gave the invalid a happier look. But it was soon apparent that the doctor was dissatisfied with his patient's progress.

"We have not yet got to the root of the matter," he said, with a grave shake of his head, when, after another fortnight of careful nursing, Maud was unable to sit up in bed for even a few minutes. "With her constitution, now that the worst is past, she ought to regain strength rapidly, instead of which she is positively no further on the road to recovery than she was a week ago."

Mr. Elsmere was nearly tempted to go to his daughter and urge her to confide in him, but Elsie interfered.

"I think, dear sir, if you will trust to me, we may find out if she really does care for Mr. Thornleigh. I really believe that if she still loves him it will be a relief to her to know that he is interested so deeply in her welfare. As it is, she has so shut herself off from all means of ascertaining what has been the result of her last interview with him, that the suspense must be dreadful. Will you leave me to contrive to ascertain her feelings on the subject?"

"I shall only be too glad to do so; and I am quite sure that you will do the work more skillfully than I should, my dear," Mr. Elsmere replied, with a feeling of relief, as if he fancied that one step had already been taken in the right direction.

"Where is baby, Elsie?" Miss Elsmere asked, in the low, weak voice to which her friends were becoming accustomed.

"Nurse has just brought him in from the garden. Do you feel well enough to see him? I will let him come in for a few minutes, if the excitement will not tire you."

"Let him come, dear. I like to see his bright ways."

Elsie went out and called to the nurse, who was going to the nursery, with the child in her arms.

"Bring him in, nurse; Miss Elsmere wishes to see him."

The woman obeyed, walking softly toward the bed.

As the child's eyes rested on Maud, he crowed delightedly, and held a beautiful geranium toward her.

"You are a very gallant young gentleman," his aunt said, with a smile. "Where did he get the flower, nurse?"

"He was stretching out his hand to try to reach one, and Mr. Thornleigh broke this spray," the woman said, with a respectful courtesy.

Elsie seemed afraid to breathe.

In a moment a change passed over the invalid's face, and Elsie feared she would swoon.

"Take baby away now," she said, to the nurse. "I ought not to have consented to let him come."

And as the woman left the room, Elsie quickly and dexterously applied the needful restoratives.

"Maudie, my darling," she said, tenderly, feeling sure now that the news she had to impart could not be other than grateful to the suffering girl, "perhaps I ought to have told you before that our dear friend, Mr. Thornleigh, came down to Elsmere with me. You know, dear, that we are all aware of that unhappy business—Mr. Thornleigh's mistake, I mean—and we are all sorry that it should have happened through us; so, when he desired to come here, so that he could hear hourly of your condition, we had not the heart to say him nay. He is so changed, dear, from what he was, that your father says it is almost impossible to believe that he has not been an invalid since his visit here at Christmas."

Elsie was kneeling on a stool by the side of Maud's bed, and her cheek rested gently against the pale, sunken face. She was not very much surprised to see tears stealing at length from under the closed eyelids.

But Maud tried to hide them, and very soon she managed to say:

"Mr. Thornleigh is a perfect enigma. Why should he profess to be interested in one whom he has so shamefully insulted?"

"He knows now, dear, and bitterly repents offering such an insult. But, my darling, think of the circumstances! Had you seen him keeping a secret assignation in the dead of the night—to say nothing of the note—would not the natural inference have been that there was something wrong? Put yourself in his place, dear. He must have loved you very dearly—indeed, that he does so now is very evident—and the notion that you could act unworthily must have given him unutterable pain. You cannot think, dear, that, loving you as he did, he would willfully wound you? But you are tired now, my love. I will go into your dressing-room to write to papa. If you want me, I shall hear your slightest movement."

And Elsie kissed the pale, wan face, and went softly away, breathing a prayer inwardly that some good might come of what she had said.

Miss Elsmere was not improving at all, the doctor thought that day; but on each succeeding one he looked more pleased, and the ominous shake of the head was seen no more.

Elsie told Mr. Thornleigh that she had spoken to her sister-in-law about him. She had a delicate task to perform; so she merely let him know that Maud had said little concerning him, but had listened quietly to her remarks in extenuation of his conduct. But that was better than nothing to his hungry soul. There was no hope of seeing his darling. It would be weeks before she would be strong enough to see any but her own family circle; so he found it necessary to return to his business duties, and to trust to his kind friends for regular bulletins from Elsmere.

CHAPTER XI.

"TIS MUCH HE DARES."

AUTUMN was far advanced when Maud Elsmere looked out again from her window upon the outer world. The trees were almost destitute of foliage, and what little still remained was looking sere, and ready to follow the heaps that were daily removed by the indefatigable gardeners from the lawn and garden paths. A few chrysanthemums and late asters still lingered, as if unwilling to show themselves routed until a severe frost should make them surrender. On the whole, it was not a very cheering or inspiring scene upon which the still weakly girl gazed with dreamy eyes.

But, in spite of the appearance of decay and change, the invalid found pleasure in looking at familiar objects. Perhaps, too, the thought that loving eyes had looked lately upon the prospect she now saw, helped to bring the bright flush to her pale face, and a light to her eyes.

"There are some letters for you, dear," Elsie said, as she noticed how much better her sister-in-law was looking. "Mr. Elsmere would not have you troubled with them before. He thinks there is nothing of great importance, as all your intimate friends have been aware of your illness. Shall I get them for you to see, Maudie?"

"Thank you, Elsie, I think I may as well just look at them," Maud said, somewhat listlessly.

When the numerous square envelopes had been opened, and their contents lightly examined, Maud set aside one lengthy epistle.

"I must read this," she said with a look of interest. "It is from Lucy Millington, Elsie."

"I saw her one day after you returned home," Elsie remarked. "She asked me if there was any truth in the report that Herbert Hilton was about to marry Eva Walsingham. I told her that it was quite true, for you had deputed me to select a wedding-present for the bride. Poor Lucy! I fancied from her manner that she had entertained some hopes in that direction for herself."

"She might have been Mrs. Hilton now," Maud said, indignantly, "if she had been less mercenary. He followed her like a shadow for days, and then she refused him because he was poor. I believe she liked him; but her mother had such a horror of poverty that she, poor girl, was afraid to accept him."

"Then subsequent events must have been rather galling to them both," Elsie said musingly. "However, Maudie, you will see how she is going on, for you have evidently quite a budget there."

Maud looked down at the closely-written pages.

"If she was disappointed about Herbert, she has soon found a panacea for her woes, Elsie; for she is about to marry one Anthony Livermore, an importer."

And Maud looked at her companion with a gleam of merriment.

"Who is going to marry that ungainly fellow?" Geoffrey asked, coming in at that moment.

"Do you know him, Geoffrey?" his sister inquired, in astonishment.

"I have seen him, and that is sufficient to know him," was the reply. "He had business transactions with the firm which had the honor of enrolling me among the number of its employees." And Geoffrey Elsmere smiled now at the change in his circumstances. "There was some rather unpleasant business, too, I remember," he added; "and altogether my impression of the man is anything but flattering."

"Poor little Lucy!" Maud said, compassionately. "She reminds me of my promise to be bridesmaid whenever she should require my services in that capacity; but she fears from accounts she has heard of my health that she will be compelled to release me from that promise. I wonder if she has also remembered one I made in connection with it—namely that I would present to her on the happy occasion a fac simile of my bracelet, with lilies of pearls and diamonds."

"Trust her! A woman who would marry a man of the Anthony Livermore type is mercenary enough for anything," Geoffrey said, with a laugh.

"I will send her a few lines of congratulation, and say that orders shall be given at once for the bracelet. Will you be my amanuensis, Elsie?" Maud asked.

"Certainly, my dear; but first of all you must let Geoffrey place you on the couch, and then I will pour you a dose of Doctor Wilson's tonic. He will be pleased to see you so much better when he pays his next visit," the fair-haired young matron continued.

Mr. Elsmere was anxious to keep his son with him at Elsmere, but Mr. Cleveland had to be consulted before any definite arrangement could be made.

Maud suggested that it would be a capital plan if Mr. Cleveland would consent to spend Christmas at the Hall, and then he could settle with her father about the future of Elsie and Geoffrey. So, as every one liked the idea, Elsie wrote to her father, who promised to try to conclude some business he had undertaken and join his friends some time in December.

The winter did not seem in any hurry to assert itself, and the shortening days passed quietly onward without any very apparent indications, save in their diminished length, of the steady approach of Christmas.

Mr. Elsmere had thought much about the coming season, but as yet had said nothing. He must be content to let this one year pass, as a few sorrowful predecessors had done, without the time-honored festivities.

It was rather a pity that after once resuming old customs they should again have to be neglected; but then it would not do to have his daughter reminded so painfully of the happy time she had spent a year ago. Having come to this conclusion, he was somewhat nonplused by Maud's own proposal on the subject.

"I think, papa, that Elsie must take my place this year in helping you to arrange for the entertainment of our guests. I should like to invite Herbert and Eva Hilton to stay here for a few days. Mr. Walsingham tells me they are coming to The Willows for a few weeks."

"But, my dear, do you think you are wise to

fill the house with company now?" her father remonstrated.

"I wish my brother to have a thorough Elsmere Christmas, dear papa. Elsie does not yet know how delightful our unconventional parties are. She has been so tossed about in her young life that I feel sure she has never realized what 'home' means, and will not do so till she can have one Christmas-time in our happy Elsmere fashion."

"It shall be as you wish, my darling. If we can make little Elsie entirely happy I should be pleased to do so, although I think she has but two wishes ungratified at present—she wishes for Mr. Cleveland's presence and for my Maudie's perfect restoration to health and happiness."

So it was settled that, under Maud's instructions, Elsie should arrange for the coming of a few guests.

Florence Hilton was included in the invitation to her brother, and Mrs. Hilton insisted on her acceptance of the invitation.

"You are not going to bury yourself here for life, my child," her mother said, when her dutiful daughter expressed her intention of declining the invitation. "When I consented to let Herbert buy the old place and beautify it, I had no intention of debarring you from the privileges which your wealth can bring you. The old place would have served me as it was, but it was not fitting that you should spend your life in a poorly-appointed household. I shall not feel happy now, my dear, if you do not accept the good gifts that fate has put in your way."

So Florence was fairly launched into aristocratic society. It was she who carried some astounding news respecting Mrs. Anthony Livermore to Elsmere. She, Florence, had been out shopping a few days before her departure from New York, when she was suddenly brought in contact with the fair girl whom she now knew to have been the cause of sorrow to her brother. But the look of childish innocence that had been so striking in Lucy Millington's face had no longer any existence. It was an expression of fear which took away the chief charm from the girl's fair loveliness, for as she and her companion, a man of about forty years of age, dressed in the extreme height of fashion, stepped out of a somewhat dashing-looking carriage, two detectives who had followed in a hack arrested the gentleman quietly, and desired him to accompany them.

Mrs. Livermore was some minutes before she could understand that her husband was really a prisoner. It was at this juncture that Miss Hilton had kindly done her best to comfort the miserable young wife. She induced her to re-enter her carriage, and then gave orders that Mrs. Livermore should be driven home. Feelings of delicacy kept Miss Hilton from accompanying her. Perhaps it would be painful to the poor girl to know that Herbert Hilton's sister had witnessed her distress, and Florence was thankful to see that as yet she was unrecognized.

After Mrs. Livermore had been disposed of, Miss Hilton turned to one of the detectives, who had not yet entered the hack.

"Pardon me," she said, in a quiet tone, to the man, "but I am interested in Mr. Livermore for his poor wife's sake. Will you tell me if the charge is a very grave one?"

"I have no objection," was the reply. "Anthony Livermore is charged with forgery, and with uttering false checks to an unusually large amount. The evidence is black against him, and there isn't the ghost of a chance for him."

So Florence Hilton went home, and on her arrival at Elsmere told the sad story of the shame and misery that had been brought upon poor Lucy by her undue regard for wealth.

Herbert Hilton was truly sorry for the poor girl, and he consulted with Miss Elsmere as to the best method of doing something to render her assistance, in case of her actual return to a life of poverty.

"My wife would like to have a small sum paid to her yearly, Miss Elsmere," he said; "but I should be thankful if you would let the poor soul imagine that the money comes from you."

"It does you and Eva credit to show such kindness to one who has shown herself so unworthy," Miss Elsmere said, with genuine admiration.

"On the contrary, we feel we owe her something for aiding us as she has done in securing the happiness we now enjoy," he replied, laughingly. "Had she been able to look into the future there is no doubt that I should now be a wretched man, instead of one of the happiest in existence."

"I am truly rejoiced at your good fortune," Maud said, earnestly. "And if I can assist you in your plans for poor Mrs. Livermore's benefit, I shall most willingly do so."

But nothing could be done until after the trial of the scoundrel who had passed as a rich man, and had with his false professions secured the influence of Mrs. Millington, who had reduced her small fortune greatly by her efforts to appear well in society.

Lucy had no love for the coarse-looking man whose eyes she had dazzled, and to whom Mrs. Millington was willing to sell her daughter for gold.

Deep indeed was the disgrace, and heavy the punishment that speedily came to the unnatural woman who had striven to drive all better instincts from her daughter's soul.

A few weeks later Anthony Livermore was found guilty; and, but for the yearly payment of five hundred dollars by Miss Elsmere, Lucy would have been obliged to earn something to eke out her mother's crippled resources.

Herbert would not consent to have Lucy informed of the real donor of the welcome assistance. He could not fancy that she would be dead to all shame; and so, in spite of Miss Elsmere's uneasiness at having to accept thanks that were really not her due, she felt bound in honor to fulfill Herbert Hilton's wishes.

The third week in December gave greater promise of wintery weather than had been expected, for there had been more than a month of damp, unhealthy weather.

But one bright night the stars came out clearly again in the steely-blue sky, and next morning the clear sunshine discovered some rather obstinate patches of ice, and after all there was a hope of seasonable weather for Christmas.

Elsie was enjoying to the full the new sense of being beloved by a larger circle of friends than she had ever hoped for. She was experiencing, too, the happiness of trying to benefit others.

Another source of excitement was lending its beautifying effects to the lovely flower-like face. But Elsie did not intend to let too many into the secret of the one paramount interest. Only her husband, of all the inmates at Elsmere, knew of the project that was filling her with delightful expectations.

Great fires were kept burning in all the rooms of the old Hall during the week before Christmas, and, with Geoffrey for a referee, Elsie succeeded in arranging the evergreens in the quaint style that had characterized them in his childhood.

Mr. Elsmere was gradually losing his anxiety respecting his daughter, and there was a feeling of peace and joy at his heart to which he had long been a stranger, when on Christmas Eve he stood with a calm, happy smile on his face, welcoming the neighboring families, who had an extra stimulus to their craving for pleasurable excitement, in anticipation of seeing Mr. Elsmere's demeanor toward his son and son's wife.

Miss Elsmere was not permitted to take any active part in the evening's gayeties. She was greatly changed since the similar occasion in the preceding year, but the change was not a very deplorable one. Certainly her beautiful long glossy hair had been cut off, but the soft little rings that were beginning to grow gave an inexpressible charm to the face that paled and flushed alternately, for Maud was not yet quite strong, and the past came very vividly before her as she saw the company preparing to enjoy themselves.

It was a great pleasure to Maud to see Mr. Cleveland's eyes following Elsie's every movement. She could not resist the temptation of going over to his side and speaking a few words of thankfulness for the happiness that had come to them. He was a pleasant companion, in spite of the reserve that had been one of his chief characteristics, and for more than an hour he kept Miss Elsmere well entertained.

So at length Elsie found them, and expressed her pleasure at finding her sister-in-law displaying so much sense.

"You are wise to sit quietly and not get overheated, especially if you intend, as I know you generally do, to go outside when the bells ring," she said to Maud. "Geoffrey and I want to go out, too; but as we do not want any to join us but just our own circle, you wrap up warmly, and go first—will you, dear?—and Geoffrey and I will contrive to join you quietly when we have discharged our duties to those who will be leaving us presently. Oh, Maudie, I am a happy girl to-night! I only wish you were equally so."

Maud smiled faintly; for although she never

spoke of Royal Thornleigh, she did not check Elsie's occasional references to him.

"I think I will go away and rest for a time, Elsie," she said, as she saw her father coming to speak to Mr. Cleveland. "Yes, dear; I shall certainly go out to hear those glorious peals. It is not likely that I, who have longed so earnestly for their sweet sounds in days gone by, shall forego the pleasure now. You will find me there when you and Geoffrey come."

And, with the little patient smile that was becoming habitual, she went away to lie down.

She could not rest, however. She was living over again those few bright hours of a year ago. How well she remembered it all—that happy, happy time when she knew that Mr. Thornleigh really loved her!

Then came the thought of the miserable time that followed, and like a warning came the words of her brother—she could almost fancy he really spoke—"Do not spoil your life for a myth." Perhaps that warning had come too late. Perhaps the man who had loved her so well had tired of her persistence. She could not blame him if he had; for had she not tried to convince him that he was nothing to her?

She had not thought then of the dreary future. It had not occurred to her, in the pride of her outraged dignity, that she was "spoiling her life." But it seemed she had done so; and not only her own, but the life of the man she loved, for she knew well that no other man could ever be anything to her.

She would not have repined so much if she alone had had to suffer for her obstinacy; but repining could do no good, so she must try to bear with the lot that she had chosen. When she had been offered her choice, she had preferred to gratify her pride rather than her love. Why should she murmur?

A few minutes before twelve she went to the old spot on the terrace.

Excepting that there was a sense of desolation in her heart, and that there was no moon to light up the landscape, there seemed to have been no interval between the time when she had stood listening, a year ago, to the first clear ringing sounds; for even as she leaned against the stonework, the peals came distinctly on the still, frosty air.

The reflections that occupied her mind were very different to those that had troubled her then. Her trouble must be buried, however, for already she could bear the casement opening, and she would not, for any consideration, add a cloud to the brightness of Elsie's horizon; that had been overcast too often in the past.

In after years, Maud could never quite remember how the next few minutes were passed.

She had a dim consciousness that she had turned to make room beside her for her brother and his wife, and that, instead of Geoffrey, she found Royal Thornleigh had returned, and was going through the last year's programme as if he, too, had found it impossible to separate this solemn time with its preceding anniversary.

But she could not remember what words were spoken; for during the semi-unconsciousness under which she reeled in those supreme moments when she realized that happiness had come to her after all, there seemed to be but one refrain breathing in time to the joyous pealing—"I have not spoiled my life."

To Geoffrey and Elsie, the half-hour's precedence which they had agreed to allow Mr. Thornleigh seemed interminable; but when it ended, and they went out in time to hear the last dying notes slowly fading away in faintly repeated echoes, the husband and wife felt that at last the cloud had been lifted from their sister's life, for Royal Thornleigh's arms were around her, and even when Elsie went forward and kissed Maud's cheek with devout thankfulness, the lover did not let his darling go.

"You may congratulate me at last, dear Mrs. Elsmere! I am to be forgiven now for my wretched blundering, thanks to your goodness in helping me to present my plea at the right moment. It will be a pleasure to me in my after life to be able to claim you as a sister," Mr. Thornleigh continued; "for next to Maudie, you will always seem the angel of my life. Shake hands, Elsmere; for in less than a month, if I can have my way, we shall be related! Look up, Maudie dearest, and let our dear friends see that my coming has done you no harm!"

But Miss Elsmere did not look up; she professed to be tired, and Elsie considerably left the lovers to say "Good-night," while she and her husband sought their respective fathers to proclaim to them that there was at length an end to the troubles brought about by Royal Thornleigh's mistake.

THE END.

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